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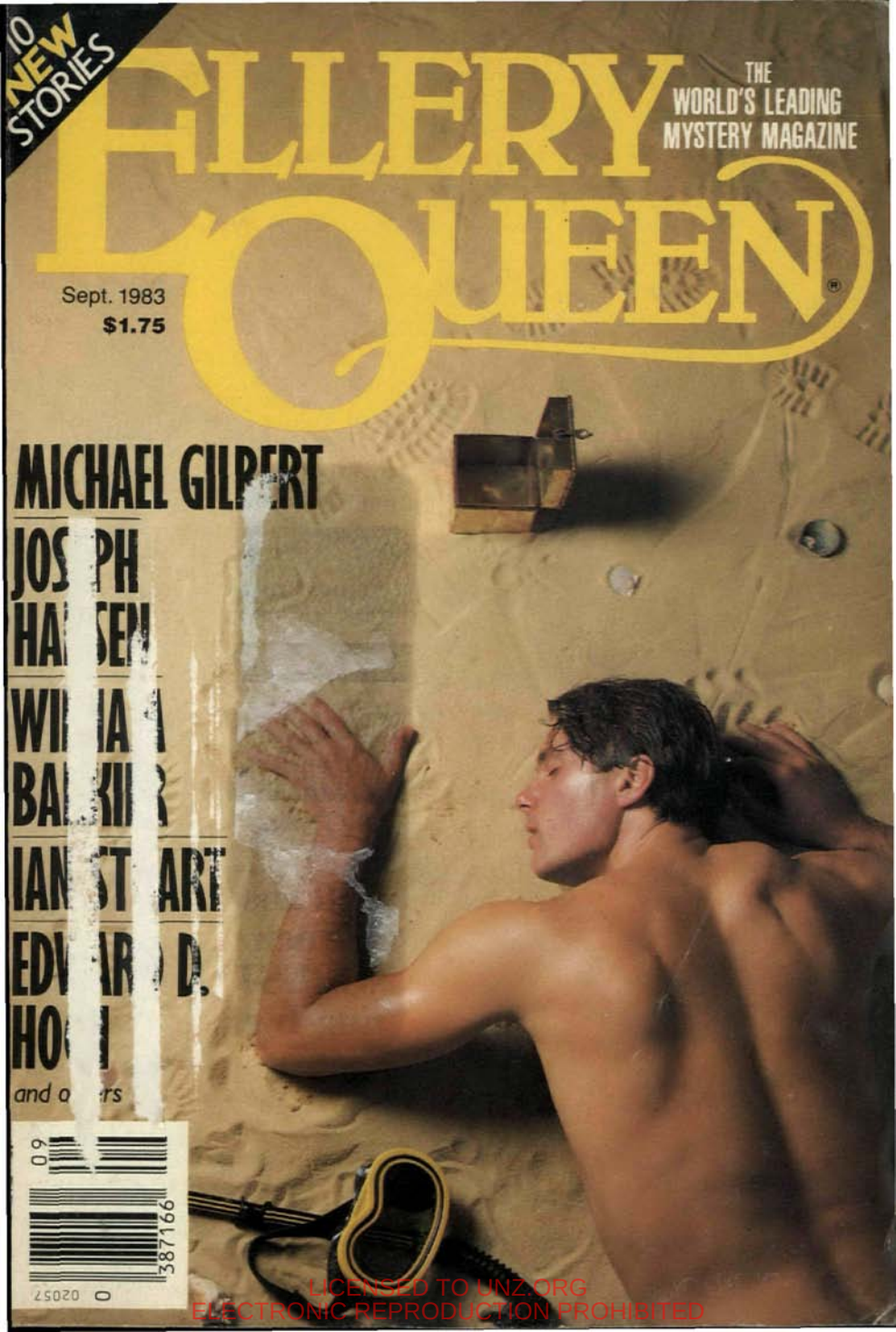

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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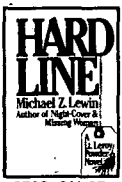

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The fog swirled slowly *round him, driven by a* heavy movement of its own, for of course there was no wind. It hung in poisonous *thick coils and loops; it* rose and sank; no light penetrated it directly from street lamp or motorcar...

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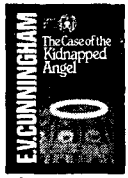

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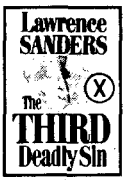

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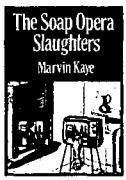

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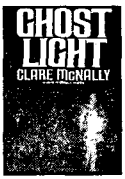

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Art Mathews shot himself, loudly and messily, in the center of the parade ring at *Dunstable races.* I was standing only six feet away from him, but he did it so quickly that had it been only six *inches I would not have had* time to stop him.

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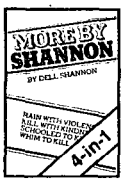

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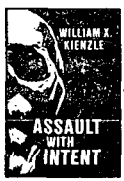

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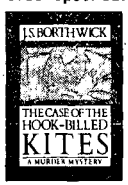

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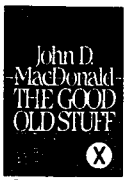

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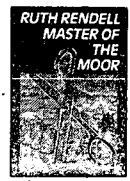

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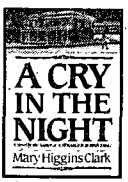

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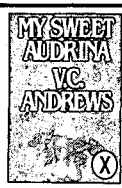

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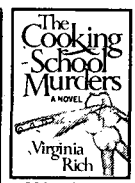
There was something strange about the house where I grew up. There were shadows in the corners and whispers on the stairs...There was a war going on in our house, a silent war that sounded no guns, and the bodies that fell were only wishes that died.



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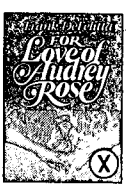

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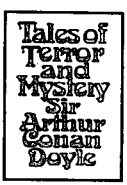

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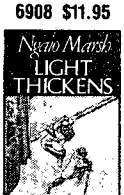

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"You must have had other women after your divorce," Molly Calendar said.

"There was only one, really," Leopold told her, "and that wasn't very serious. It was more than fifteen years ago. Her name was Nina."

"What happened to her?"

"I ended up arresting her for murder," he said, and was sorry the instant the words were out of his mouth . . .

SUDDENLY IN SEPTEMBER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Captain Leopold had been encountering Molly Calendar once or twice a week at the cafeteria in the Hall of Justice building, and they'd begun having coffee together in the morning and during the lunch break. It wasn't a planned thing but Leopold found himself looking forward to it, and felt disappointed on those days when he didn't see her at her usual table.

Molly was doing a great deal of trial work that summer, more by default than anything else. As she explained to him one morning in late August, "Everyone's on vacation, especially this month. I'm the newest partner in the firm, so I drew a November vacation. It's a good thing I like to ski."

"Where do you ski in November?" Leopold asked. "That's early for New England."

"Last year I splurged and flew to Europe." She brushed the straight black hair from her face with her hand. "This year I'll probably spend Thanksgiving with my mother out in San Francisco instead."

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"Is that where you're from?"

"Chicago. But we moved to San Francisco a year before I started college, so it's something like home to me. I even practiced law there for a while before moving East."

"What was the attraction of our little city?" Leopold asked, sipping his coffee.

She shrugged and smiled. "I couldn't decide between New York and Boston, and this is halfway in between."

"What case are you on today?"

"A house burglary. My client has a record and I'm trying to convince him he should plead guilty to a lesser charge. His fingerprints were all over the place and if it goes to trial I don't have much hope."

"Things seem quiet around here this week."

"Sure. It's not only the lawyers who are on vacation. The judges are away. Even the witnesses are tough to line up. Everything gets postponed until after Labor Day."

Leopold finished his coffee. "There's Lieutenant Fletcher looking for me. I have to get back to work."

She smiled. "See you around."

Leopold took a good deal of kidding from Fletcher about his friendship with Molly Calendar. "You're the talk of headquarters these days, Captain. I wouldn't mind being cross-examined by her—she's one beautiful girl!"

"And she's a good lawyer," Leopold insisted, rising to her defense. "I sat in on one of her cases last week. Sometimes I think she's *too* good, helping some bad characters get back on the street. I told her she should go to work for the District Attorney's office, get on the right side."

"I came to get you because Connie thinks she has a break in that county infirmary case. She brought in Ruddy Simmons for questioning."

"Good—let's go see him." Leopold set off at a fast pace, heading across the street to police headquarters. His pleasant interlude with Molly Calendar was forgotten.

Sergeant Connie Trent had spent the past several weeks investigating the fatal beating of a young man in a parking lot behind the county infirmary. There was no mystery about who had done it. A former employee named Greg Millgate had been arrested while fleeing from the scene and had admitted under questioning that he'd

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hit the deceased with his fists and a tire iron. What bothered Connie was the seeming lack of motive. "Bad blood between them" had been one explanation, but Connie wanted to dig deeper.

Now she'd brought in one of the infirmary employees, a male nurse named Ruddy Simmons, and she wanted Leopold present for the questioning. Simmons was a sandy-haired fellow with tiny eyes and a way of staring off into space when he answered questions. He'd been arrested once about ten years earlier on a drug-related charge, but the grand jury failed to return an indictment. The records showed his age was thirty-six and he'd been employed at the county infirmary for seven years.

Connie came right to the point, as Leopold sat behind his desk and listened. "You've been in trouble with drugs before, Ruddy. It's right here in front of me."

He twisted his face into a sudden frown. "Come on, lady—If you got the file there you know the charges were dismissed. I took some amphetamines from a hospital pharmacy and forgot to check them out. It was an honest mistake and the grand jury believed me. Is that going to haunt me all my life?"

Leopold felt it was time to interrupt. "We're investigating the murder of Don Yeager, one of your fellow employees. We're not trying to harass you on a drug charge."

"Yeager was killed by Greg Millgate and you know it! Hell, the guy confessed to it!"

"But why?" Connie asked. "Sure, he admits the killing—but he won't say why he did it. We've had reports of drug shortages and possible thefts at the county infirmary—"

"Any hospital in this country that tells you it doesn't have drug thefts is lying. There's no way to prevent it completely. Drugs have to be available twenty-four hours a day in hospitals, and many people have access to them. It's especially bad at the infirmary where we have prisoners brought in all the time for one thing or another. We have to watch them all the time."

"Did the dead man, Yeager, have access to drugs?"

"I suppose so, sure. Like I told you, I didn't know him very well. He'd only worked there a few weeks."

"And Millgate?"

"Yeah, I know Millgate. He got fired and Yeager was hired to replace him. That's why there was bad blood between them."

"That's a slim motive for murder," Leopold observed. "It certainly wasn't Yeager's fault Millgate was fired."

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"Well, you ask him. Don't ask me."

Leopold called Connie into the hall where they held a whispered consultation. "What are you after, Connie? Do you think Simmons is involved in a drug-theft ring?"

"I think it's a strong possibility, Captain. Millgate got cut out of his share of the take by Yeager, so he killed him. I was on the narcotics squad long enough to know these fellows play for keeps."

"You may be right, but as things stand we can't hold Simmons. There's nothing to involve him except a ten-year-old charge that was dismissed. He's clean, Connie."

He saw the disappointment in her face, but she was too good a cop to argue with him. "You're right, of course. I was hoping we might get something out of him." She went back into Leopold's office and said, "You can go now, Ruddy. But we may be out to see you again before the start of Millgate's trial."

"You know where to find me. Always glad to help."

Leopold watched him strut through the squad room and disappear into the elevator. Then he turned back to Connie. "He's the sort who never gets caught. He finds other people to do the dirty work for him."

"Do I stay on it, Captain?"

"See what the D.A.'s office says. If they're satisfied with the case against Millgate, there's no point in our pursuing it."

Connie told him the following morning the prosecutor thought he could make a case out of the job angle without bringing up the subject of missing drugs. A trial date of September fifteenth had been set. The case was closed as far as Leopold's office was concerned. Connie would be called to testify at the trial, but otherwise there was nothing more to be done. If the prosecutor was satisfied, they were satisfied.

Leopold took a few days' vacation at the beginning of September, and when he returned after Labor Day the pace of activity had definitely picked up. Though he stopped in the Hall of Justice cafeteria a couple of times his first days back, he didn't find Molly Calendar there. He imagined she was busy with court appearances and legal briefs. His own department was busy, too, with Connie and Fletcher each working on a homicide. He considered the possibility of phoning Molly at her office, just to say he was back, but that seemed foolish. He'd run into her sooner or later.

It was on Friday of Labor Day week, September tenth, that Connie

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Trent burst into his office just before noon. Her face was drained of blood. "Captain, we just got a call from the county jail. There's been a stabbing in one of the cells. A prisoner was killed."

Leopold started to rise. "We'd better get over there."

"Captain—"

There was something more. "What is it, Connie?"

She took a deep breath. "Molly Calendar was alone with him when it happened. They say it looks as if she killed him."

The dead man's name was Kenneth Lymon. He'd been arrested two days earlier for carrying a concealed weapon. It was a routine sort of case. Bail had been set at $5,000 only because Lymon was a stranger in town who refused to say where he was from or why he'd been carrying the weapon, a Walther P-38 automatic pistol. The feeling at the D.A.'s office had been that Lymon might be a wanted criminal and so they decided to keep him on ice till he could be checked out. Unable to post bail, Lymon had remained in jail. But somehow he had managed to hire himself a lawyer.

That lawyer was Molly Calendar.

"I can't imagine how it happened," she told Leopold when he came into view along the corridor of cells on the second floor of the county jail. "One minute we were sitting talking about his case and the next minute he gasped in pain and toppled over."

He reached out to touch her hand and then thought better of it. Whatever had happened here, Molly seemed very much in control of herself. Just as he would have expected. "We'll get to the bottom of it," he assured her, stepping into the open cell. The jail superintendent, a husky ex-Marine named Sam Omak, was already there, looking helpless.

"We never had anything like this before," he told Leopold. "She was alone with him. It must have—"

"Why was she in his cell rather than a conference room?" Leopold asked, staring down at the body slumped forward on the cot.

"Another prisoner was using one of them and the other one's being painted. Hell, it's not unusual, Captain. Attorneys are often allowed to confer with prisoners in their cells. This isn't the state prison, you know."

"The door was locked after she was admitted?"

"Of course. As it happens I brought her up myself. I met her coming, and took care of her as a courtesy."

"Was she searched for a weapon?"

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"No," Omak admitted, looking a bit sheepish. "Visitors have to pass through a metal detector, but we don't usually make legal counsel do that."

The medical examiner arrived at that moment and they stepped back to give him room. He looked at the small, thin-bladed knife that had been driven into Kenneth Lymon's back. "It's murder, all right, in case there was any doubt. There's no way he could have stabbed himself at that angle unless he was a real contortionist. Get some photographs and then I'll remove the weapon."

Leopold retreated from the crowded cell and stood in the corridor with Sam Omak. He was trying to get his mind working, to counter the sinking feeling in his stomach. "What's beyond that window?" he asked the superintendent, indicating a small rectangular opening beyond a little shelf at the end of the bunk. It was about five feet from the floor, covered with heavy wire mesh.

"Parking lot, two stories down."

"The window's open a bit."

"Sure, but Lymon was seated on the cot when he was knifed. You think someone fired the knife up through the window and then it curved down and into his back? That would be some trick."

The medical examiner carefully removed the knife after Fletcher had dusted it for fingerprints and found nothing but smudges. Leopold slipped it into a plastic evidence bag and held it up to the mesh-covered window. "It wouldn't fit anyway," he decided. "It's a small knife, but the metal guard is too wide to pass through the screen."

"I guess that nails it down," Sam Omak said.

Leopold didn't reply. Instead he asked to use one of the conference rooms, and suggested to Molly that they go there while he took her statement. Omak chased the painter away and they found themselves at one end of a table draped with a paint-splattered drop cloth. "Have you figured out how he did it?" Molly asked as they sat down.

"Did what?" Leopold asked.

"Killed himself, of course. There's no other explanation."

"Tell me everything that happened, from the moment you arrived in the building." He prepared to take notes.

"Well, I arrived here around eleven and ran into Sam Omak downstairs. You know Sam—he's a great one for a little harmless flirting. He insisted on bringing me up to Lymon's cell personally. He explained that these regular conference rooms weren't available, but said it would be perfectly all right for me to see my client in his cell. He got the key from the guard, unlocked the cell door, made some

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joking remark to Lymon about behaving himself with a lady present, and then locked us in. He said to call the guard when I'd finished."

"Was the guard right outside?"

"No, he was at his desk down at the end of the corridor—twenty or thirty feet away."

"And from his desk he couldn't see into the cell," Leopold said, remembering the layout. "What did you and Lymon talk about?"

"Well, you know the case. An officer stopped his car two days ago for running a stop sign. Lymon acted a bit odd, and when the officer searched him he found an unlicensed gun in a shoulder holster. My client was arrested and when he refused to give an address or offer any explanation, he was ordered held on five thousand dollars' bail. The car had been rented at the airport and he carried no identification with him. The suspicion, I suppose, was that he was a criminal or wanted for something."

"How did you become his lawyer?"

"He called our firm and I was assigned to him. He wrote a check for the retainer and it cleared his bank yesterday. That's why I came over today."

"Then you know where he's from."

She shrugged. "The bank is Midcity Trust Company, Columbus, Ohio. It doesn't mean he lives there."

"All right, go on. What did you talk about?"

"He wanted to get out on bail. He said he had the money now and could post the entire five thousand if necessary. But he was hoping I could get it reduced."

"Why was he carrying the gun?"

"He said he worked for a delivery service and his job sometimes made it necessary to transport jewelry and other valuables. The gun went with the job."

"Then it would have been licensed," Leopold pointed out. "Or he could have explained the situation two days ago rather then sit in a cell."

"I never had a chance to ask him the right questions," Molly admitted. "He died."

"That's the part I want to hear about. How long had you been talking to him?"

"Not long. About five minutes. It was our first meeting and it was more of a get-acquainted session. I think he was a bit surprised they'd sent a woman attorney to represent him."

"Did he seem to mind?"

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"No, not really. He just seemed—perhaps a bit nervous and uncomfortable with me. And then someone knocked on the wall."

"What's that?"

"The person in the next cell knocked on the wall and called his name. Lymon jerked up, surprised, and yelled out that he was busy with his lawyer. It was less than a minute afterward that he gasped and keeled over on the bunk. As soon as I saw the knife in his back I called the guard."

"But the wall is solid," Leopold pointed out. "There's no opening in it."

"I know that. I didn't say the person in the next cell killed him—he must have done that himself. Somehow." She looked away, frustrated.

He took a deep breath. "Molly, did you stab Kenneth Lymon?"

"*Me?* Of course not! Why would I?" And then her voice broke, all at once. "My God, is that what they think? Is that what *you* think?"

"I don't know what to think, Molly. There's no one else."

"He did it himself!" she repeated.

"He couldn't have. The medical examiner says the angle is wrong. Besides, why would he stab himself while talking to you in his cell?"

"Why would *I* stab him?"

He shook his head to clear away the cobwebs. He wasn't thinking straight. He was sitting here virtually accusing her of murder. Her. "I don't know, Molly."

"Are you going to arrest me?" she asked.

"No, of course not. I'll see what the D.A.'s office thinks. We may have to present it to a grand jury—"

"And *then* arrest me."

He reached out to pat her hand reassuringly. "It'll be all right. Don't worry."

He left her and walked back to the cells. The body had been removed and things were returning to normal. Sam Omak was at the desk in his office. "Who's got the cell next to Lymon?" Leopold asked.

Omak consulted the morning report in front of him. "One side is empty—so's the cell across the way."

"The other side. Where the bunk is."

"That's Greg Millgate. He's being held in that fatal beating out behind the county infirmary."

It seemed like a hundred years ago, before Leopold's days off, that he'd sat in on the session when Connie questioned Ruddy Simmons.

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He'd completely forgotten about the Millgate case. "I'll want to question him," he said. "Can you have him brought around?"

Omak glanced at the big wall clock. "They're out of their cells at lunch now, and then there's a recreation period. But I'll have the guard bring him up as soon as he finishes eating."

While Leopold waited, he asked Fletcher to check with the D.A.'s office on the case. He knew if it had been anyone but Molly who'd been in that cell he'd have held the person for questioning, at the very least. But he was reluctant to take that step. He didn't want to take it unless the district attorney insisted upon it.

Presently a guard entered the conference room with Greg Millgate. He was a tall, ruggedly handsome young man with curly black hair. Leopold had seen him briefly just after his arrest. "I've answered all the questions about Yeager," he said as he sat down.

"This isn't about Yeager. It's about Kenneth Lymon, the man who was killed in the cell next to yours."

"I don't know anything about that."

"Just before he died you knocked on the wall and called to him."

"Maybe I did. We chatted a couple of times."

"Did you know him?"

"You mean before I got in here? Never heard of the guy before."

"What did he seem like to you?"

Millgate shrugged. "He was friendly enough at meals and during the recreation periods. I only knew him a couple of days."

"Had he made any enemies among the other prisoners?"

"Hell, man, this is the county jail! It's not a state prison or something! Everyone's cool in here."

"What about Yeager? You weren't cool when you beat him to death with a tire iron."

"That was outside. That was different."

"All right." Leopold signalled to the guard. "I'm finished now."

He looked around for Molly, but they told him she'd gone back to her office. He went across the street to his own office and dug out the arrest record on Lymon. It told him nothing he didn't already know. The arresting officer stated that Lymon had opened his coat, virtually flaunting the concealed weapon.

It was two hours later before Fletcher returned. "Bad news, Captain. The D.A. thinks he's got a case. He's had Maxwell questioning Molly at her office, and now he thinks he has a motive. He wants to present the case to a grand jury on Monday morning."

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Leopold felt a sudden chill. "What motive?"

"Lymon had built up a neat double life. He really was a bonded messenger, but he was also a paid hit man. They think he may have killed a friend of Molly's in San Francisco."

Leopold phoned Molly at her office and suggested they have dinner together. She was silent for a moment, then she asked, "Is this official or personal?"

"Does it need a label?"

"No, I suppose not."

She met him at a little French restaurant on the ground floor of her building, looking weary but composed. They had a drink and then ordered. She suggested they split the bill but he wouldn't hear of it. "You're taking me to dinner and I don't even know your first name," she objected.

"I rarely use my first name."

"What is it?"

He told her.

"What's wrong with that? It's a terrific name."

"There's that French detective with the same first name. People used to kid me when I was younger."

"No one would think of kidding you now," she said with a grin.

They talked about the city, and about her law practice and the partners in her firm. It wasn't until dessert arrived that she said, "All right, I can take the bad news now. What's happening with the Lymon killing?"

"Nothing much. I've got no suspects."

"Except me."

"No—"

"Don't lie to me. I know you were closeted with the district attorney for more than an hour this afternoon."

"Word does travel."

"I'm in the profession, remember?"

He toyed with his ice cream. "All right, he's presenting it to the grand jury on Monday."

"What's he asking for?"

"Murder two."

Her face went white and she pushed her coffee cup away.

"It's only a formality. They'll never indict you."

"They will if there are no other suspects."

"Do you want the rest of the bad news?"

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"Give it to me."

"They wanted to charge you this afternoon, but I persuaded them to wait till Monday. I told them I'd be responsible for you over the weekend."

"What do you propose to do—move in with me?"

He hoped he wasn't blushing. "No. I'm sure you won't leave town."

"Thanks," she said with a touch of irony.

Leopold put down his spoon. "They think they have a motive."

"Oh? What?"

"You had a friend named Kulligan in San Francisco—Betsy Kulligan. She was the bookkeeper for an electronics firm with ties to organized crime."

"Yes, I knew Betsy—we went to college together. But she dropped out. I saw very little of her after that. Just once, last year."

"You're aware that she was killed in a hit-and-run accident, possibly to keep her from testifying against her employer?"

"That was the rumor. I told you I wasn't close to her."

"They think Lymon might have been the one hired to kill her. The organized-crime task force in New York has quite a file on him, listing more than a dozen suspected hits. Betsy Kulligan was one of them, and someone remembered that she visited you here last year."

"She was passing through town on her vacation and she phoned me. We had lunch together. Six months later she was dead. I was sorry to hear it, and I'm especially sorry if she was murdered. But I certainly didn't kill Kenneth Lymon because of it. How would I know he was implicated in her death?"

"You wouldn't, of course. And I believe you when you say she was only a casual friend. But the D.A. thinks it establishes a motive."

"He's a fool. He's not much better than Hope was," she said, referring to the previous district attorney who'd recently been forced to resign following the investigation of a killing at police headquarters.

"You had a client murdered during that Hope business, too," Leopold reminded her. "Maybe you're a jinx."

"Don't joke about it," she said. Leopold paid the check and they started for the door. He was walking her across the street to the parking ramp when she suddenly touched his arm.

"I know that man. He's an investigator for the D.A.'s office."

Leopold followed her gaze to a man at the wheel of a car down the

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block. "I know him, too. His name is Schultz. I guess they didn't trust you. Or me."

"He's waiting to follow my car, isn't he?"

"Looks like it. They've probably got someone else watching your apartment."

"Damn!"

"I'll drive you to my place. Maybe later we can sneak you home."

They skirted the block to circle back to the headquarters parking lot a few blocks away. Leopold lived in a high-rise apartment building about fifteen minutes from downtown. He parked the car and took her up in the elevator. "It's a bachelor pad," he warned apologetically. "Don't expect too much."

But she was impressed. "It's so neat! I never realized that about you."

"An orderly mind," he said with a smile. "Can I get you a drink?"

"I don't know. Maybe a liqueur, if you have any—" She spoke his first name.

"Call me Leopold," he said, opening a cabinet door beneath a bookcase. "I'm used to it."

"Were you ever married?"

"Yes," he answered, remembering Monica.

"Forgive me for asking."

"No, no." He handed her a tiny glass filled with creme de menthe, the only liqueur he had. "In fact, I've wanted to tell you about her—about how she died."

"I'm sorry to hear it."

He sat beside her on the sofa. "We'd been divorced a long time when it happened, about eleven years ago. She'd come east for a niece's wedding and I was invited, too. At the reception we had a confrontation alone in a room away from the others. She was shot while I was with her and most people thought I must have killed her."

"Like Lymon and me."

"Yes," he agreed. "Fletcher believed in me, though, and we finally managed to prove she killed herself. If we did it that time, we can do it again."

"I didn't stab him, Leopold. I wouldn't. I couldn't."

"I believe you."

They talked of many things after that, of her life and his life, of her friends and his. They talked shop. But they didn't mention Ken-

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neth Lymon again. It was all understood. Finally, after eleven, Leopold said, "You'll stay here tonight. I can sleep here on the sofa."

"No."

"I'm not taking you home."

"I don't want you to." She kissed him gently on the mouth.

After a time Leopold said, "I'm fifty-nine years old, Molly."

"And I'm thirty-two. So what?"

In the morning, as she made breakfast, Molly said, "You must have had other women after your divorce. Tell me about them."

"You first," he said with a grin. "How'd you get to be thirty-two without being married?"

She shrugged. "Too busy with a career, I guess. Come on, what about your women?"

"There was only one, really, and that wasn't very serious. It was more than fifteen years ago. Her name was Nina."

"What happened to her?"

"I ended up arresting her for murder," he said, and was sorry the instant the words were out of his mouth.

The Hall of Justice was deserted on a Saturday, except for the district attorney's suite of offices where one could always find some assistant D.A. working in the law library on his or her preparation for next week's cases. This Saturday it was Jason Maxwell, a young man Leopold knew well.

"How's it going?" Maxwell asked him. "Are you still on the Lymon killing?"

"I'm still on it," Leopold admitted. "You can call off your watchdogs any time. Molly Calendar is in my custody."

"Yeah, well—"

"You have my word that she'll be available on Monday morning."

"All right," Maxwell said. "Your word is good enough for me."

At the county jail it was more like any other day. The noise of the prisoners at their recreation period mingled with the sound of radios and television. Leopold found Sam Omak in his office and said, "This sure is a noisy place."

"Nothing quiet about jails," Omak agreed. "We're trying to get the county legislature to pay for acoustical improvements, but we've had no luck yet."

"I was wondering if I could examine Greg Millgate's cell during the recreation period."

"Sure. Come along."

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Millgate's cell was the mirror image of the one Lymon had been using on the other side of the wall. Both their bunks were attached to that wall, and Leopold bent down to examine the attachments. Where metal bolts were driven into concrete, there was often a chipping away of the latter. "Do you really think Millgate stabbed him through that wall?" the superintendent asked, watching Leopold.

"Stranger things have happened."

"Not much stranger, I'll bet. That wall's as solid as they come."

Leopold had to agree with him. There wasn't a single opening anywhere in the wall between the cells. He went into Lymon's cell next, noting that the dead man's few personal possessions had been removed. "Could he have had the knife when he was arrested?"

"Not a chance," Omak said, "New prisoners are strip-searched and we go over every inch of them, looking mainly for narcotics. There isn't a chance in the world a knife could be sneaked in."

Leopold noticed again the shelf at the far end of the bunk. It was about two feet long and four inches deep. "Do you remember what was on this shelf?"

"Toothpaste and a toothbrush, I think. Some prisoners keep a clock there, but Lymon didn't have one."

Back in his office, a wave of depression was settling in on Leopold. He wanted to phone Molly at his apartment, but there was nothing to tell her. No good news, no bad news. Just nothing.

Connie Trent was on duty and he asked her to bring him the Lymon murder weapon. When she did, he sat staring at the slim-bladed knife in its plastic evidence envelope for a long time, waiting to be inspired. It was an odd sort of dagger. "Nothing?" Connie asked.

He shook his head.

"It's going to the grand jury on Monday."

"I know."

"Do you think she did it?"

He looked up. "Do you?"

"Of course not. I've only known Molly a short time, but she's no killer. If only they hadn't come up with that business about her friend in San Francisco."

"That's all speculation. Molly hardly knew the woman. How did they get all that information on Lymon so fast anyhow?"

"Maxwell at the D.A.'s office told me he'd built up a clever dual identity. He really did have the job he claimed, delivering valuable

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parcels. It gave him a cover for traveling around the country. If we'd checked him out in the usual manner, it would have looked all right. The judge might have fined him for carrying an unlicensed handgun, but that would have been the end of it. Once he was killed, though, Maxwell had a hunch and wired his fingerprints to the organized-crime task force and they got back right away with a complete dossier on him, including that list of possible victims across the country. Maxwell had run into Molly the day she was having lunch with her San Francisco friend and he remembered the name."

"That was Molly's bad luck. A dumb coincidence—"

"You know, that's a funny looking knife."

"What's funny about it?" Leopold asked.

"Well, the handle's longer than the blade. You don't often see knives like that."

He disagreed with her. "Switchblades and jackknives always have a handle longer than the blade, because the blade has to fit inside the—"

"What is it?"

He took the knife from its envelope and stared at it. He gripped the blade between his thumb and forefinger and pushed, but it didn't budge. Leopold paused, exasperated. Then he fiddled with the metal guard. This was rewarded with a tiny click. As he pushed the point of the knife against his desktop, the blade retracted into the handle. When completely closed, it was only a little over four inches long. "A spring knife," he said to Connie. He carefully applied pressure to the guard and the blade shot out with unexpected force. "It's a sort that was illegal for a while in this state. You could walk up to somebody, press it against their back, and the blade would shoot out to stab them."

"A nice little toy."

"But how did it get into the cell, Connie? If we knew that, we'd know a lot."

"I can't help you there, Captain. But the medical examiner just sent over his autopsy report on Lymon. Do you want to see it?"

"Anything unusual?"

"It seems routine to me."

"Make me a copy and I'll take it home with me."

It was nearly dinnertime when he returned to the apartment. Molly had cleaned the place and was busy in the kitchen. "Hi," she said, greeting him with a kiss.

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"Hi, yourself. What's this? Don't you know I like my women liberated and out of the kitchen?"

"Who said I was your woman?"

"Nobody, I guess. I stand corrected."

"How'd you make out today?" she asked.

"I didn't. I talked to Maxwell, looked at the cell again, examined the murder weapon." He described it. "I brought home a copy of the autopsy report."

"We can read it after dinner. Come on, let's eat."

Later she asked him, "What are my chances, Leopold?"

"You're the lawyer. What do you think?"

"I don't know. I've seen innocent people go to prison before."

"They haven't even indicted you yet. Don't talk about prison."

"But you haven't found anything. The D.A. and Maxwell are building their case and we don't have a thing."

"We've got you. A lot of people know you and like you. Your reputation counts for something."

"Not as much as you'd think. If I get lucky with a jury they might knock it down to manslaughter."

He was growing angry. "Stop that. Yesterday you couldn't believe anyone would think you guilty. Today you're on your way to prison."

"I've had all day to think about it more realistically."

He took out the autopsy report and handed it to her. "Here's realism for you. Read it while I load the dishwasher."

She glanced over it. "I know he was stabbed in the back. That doesn't tell me a thing."

"Was the thrust up or down?"

"Straight in, apparently."

"That's odd."

"The whole thing is odd. But his appendix was all right. Isn't that great news? The man's dead but he had *appendix normal* on his autopsy."

"They have to examine everything," Leopold said, but it did seem out of line. The wound would have been nowhere near the appendix.

He was still thinking about it in the morning when he got up, and he went to the telephone to call the medical examiner at home. Molly heard him phoning and came to the door of the bedroom to listen.

"Doc? This is Captain Leopold."

"Do you know what time it is, Captain? On a Sunday morning?"

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"I'm sorry," Leopold said, "but I wanted to ask you about the Lymon autopsy. Why did you examine his appendix?"

"Sam Omak asked me to."

"Omak asked you?"

"It seems that on Thursday night Lymon complained of sharp pains in the area of his appendix. The doctors couldn't find anything and when the pain subsided he was brought back to the jail. But Omak was wondering about it."

When Leopold hung up, he told Molly about it.

"So what does it mean?" she asked. "That he'd swallowed the knife and it was inside him all the time?"

"It's a bit large for that, but—" He was seeing all the pieces of the puzzle in front of him, like a giant jigsaw. And suddenly it came together. "Damn!" he cried. "I had the whole thing backwards!"

At ten o'clock on Monday morning Leopold walked into the grand-jury room and seated himself in the witness chair. He looked out over the faces of the twenty-three men and women and began to speak. "Because of the weekend's events I've asked permission of the district attorney to address you, and to answer any questions you might have regarding the stabbing death on Friday of Kenneth Lymon, a prisoner at the county jail.

"As Mr. Maxwell has already told you, Lymon was stabbed in the back shortly after eleven o'clock on Friday morning while alone in his locked cell with Miss Molly Calendar, his attorney. Though circumstances seemed to indicate that no one but Miss Calendar could have plunged the knife into his back, I intend to show you that the circumstances were quite deceiving.

"Since a jail is, by definition, full of criminals, I began searching for the killer among the other prisoners. I was especially interested in the man in the adjoining cell, Greg Millgate, due to go on trial this week for the beating death of an employee of the county infirmary. I tried to imagine how Millgate might have stabbed Lymon through that solid concrete wall between their cells. And that was where I went wrong. I had it backward.

"We know that Kenneth Lymon was a hired hit man, a skilled practitioner who traveled across the country without ever being apprehended. We know furthermore that he was so good, an organized-crime task force had a thick dossier on him. Is this the sort of man who gets arrested for going through a stop sign and then revealing to a police officer that he's carrying a concealed weapon?

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It sounded like the height of amateurism for a man we suspected of being in town on a murder mission.

"But suppose he really was the skilled professional of that dossier? Suppose he was arrested and put in the county jail because that's exactly where he wanted to be? Suppose Kenneth Lymon was in jail because the man he'd been hired to kill was in jail?"

There was a silence in the jury room and Leopold paused to look around at their faces. They were hanging on every word now. "Suppose," he continued, "it was not Millgate who stabbed Lymon through that wall but Lymon who'd come to the jail to kill Millgate?

"Was there a reason why someone would have wanted Millgate dead at this time? Yes, there was. Two days from now, on September fifteenth, Millgate's trial for murder opens. It's a case involving allegations of large-scale drug thefts from the county infirmary. As his trial approached, it became more likely that Greg Millgate, silent till now about the thefts, would decide to talk."

One of the grand jurors raised his hand for a question. "If you'll excuse me, Captain, this seems highly speculative. If you're going to tell us Lymon had the knife with him to use as a weapon against Millgate, how did he get it into the jail in the first place? Aren't prisoners carefully searched?"

"They are," Leopold admitted. "At least when they first arrive. But if they're taken out under guard and then returned, the search tends to be less thorough. I didn't learn until yesterday morning that Kenneth Lymon was removed from the jail on Thursday night. He complained of pains in his side and the doctors checked him for appendicitis before returning him to jail. I called Sam Omak, the jail superintendent, and asked where he was taken, but I already knew the answer. Minor ills are treated at the county infirmary, and the patient is sent to a hospital only if the condition proves to be serious. Lymon's pain went away and he was returned to jail, with the knife hidden on him where it would go undetected in a routine search.

"I think Lymon planned to kill Millgate Friday noon during the lunch or recreation period. It would have been easy enough for a professional killer armed with a spring knife like this." Leopold held it up and showed them how it operated. "He'd have stepped behind Millgate in a crowd, pushed the closed blade against his back to release the spring, and then simply walked away as his victim sank to the floor."

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"You're saying he accidentally stabbed himself?" a woman juror asked.

"Yes, I am. This knife when closed measures about four and a half inches long. Omak and Miss Calendar appeared at his cell door unannounced, and Miss Calendar entered to confer with him. This was not the usual routine. Normally he would have been expecting to be summoned to one of the conference rooms for such a meeting. When they appeared, he must have been holding the knife. He only had time to slip it onto a narrow shelf at the end of his bunk, and then sit on the bunk in front of the shelf to hide the knife from view. The shelf measures four inches, so if the knife was placed perpendicular to the back wall it extended out a half inch beyond the shelf. In other words, this metal guard, the blade's release mechanism, extended beyond the edge of the shelf.

"Do you see what happened now? By a trick of fate, Millgate—the intended victim—was in the very next cell. Lymon nervously conversed with Molly Calendar while trying to keep the knife hidden. Suddenly Millgate thumped on the wall and shouted his name, no doubt quite loudly to attract his attention over the usual jail noise. Lymon jumped, started, and his back hit the shelf, hit the knife's release mechanism, and released the blade. Remember the other end of the knife was firmly against the wall behind the shelf. The blade shot into Lymon's back. He must have realized what had happened at once, but with a thin blade like this it would have been several seconds before the pain and extent of the damage made themselves felt. He continued talking to Molly Calendar for nearly a minute, desperately trying to hide his injury from the contraband knife, before he keeled over and died."

The foreman of the grand jury raised his hand. "Is there any way of proving this?"

"I think we have the proof. I spoke with Greg Millgate in his cell yesterday and told him what we'd learned. It was enough to convince him. He made a full statement regarding the theft of drugs at the infirmary. It was when a man named Yeager forced him out of the lucrative racket that he beat Yeager and killed him. The man behind it all is a male nurse named Ruddy Simmons. One of my men, Lieutenant Fletcher, arrested him last evening and obtained a statement admitting his part in the drug thefts. He also admitted hiring Kenneth Lymon to kill Millgate in jail before his trial started, and slipping the knife to Lymon while he was being examined at the infirmary Thursday night."

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The jurors were impressed. "I'm willing to agree that Lymon's death was accidental," the assistant district attorney told them.

"Death by misadventure," Leopold added, "as they say in England."

Molly Calendar came back to the apartment that night. "I didn't expect to see you again so soon," Leopold said, "but I'm glad you came."

"A girl has to say thank you. I would have been spending tonight in a cell if it wasn't for you."

He smiled. "Want to stay for dinner?"

She came into his arms.

Later, after dark, he sat staring out the window at the lights of the city. She asked, "What about us, Leopold?"

"What about us? I'm as old as your father."

"Older, by one year. But I hadn't noticed it making much difference."

Somewhere far away a siren sounded, reminding him of his work. "I've got a job that keeps me pretty busy."

"We've both got jobs that keep us busy."

He stared out the window again, knowing now that this was how it happened. Not slowly but suddenly, in the September of his life. He turned and smiled.

"I think we should get married," he said.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Maralyn Horsdal, author of EQMM "first story" #604, grew up in Ottawa, Canada, earned a B.A. in Geography at Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, and taught school for two years in Ghana, West Africa, with CUSO, the Peace Corps equivalent in Canada. She then received an M.A. in African Studies at the London (England) School of Economics and taught another two years in Ghana. She has made maps of routes of explorers for the National Atlas of Canada *and now works as a free-lance book editor. She lives on Saltspring Island, a small island between the mainland of British Columbia and Vancouver Island. Her husband is an architecture student and she says, "Cooking and eating, as is no doubt perfectly obvious from the story, are among our favorite hobbies . . ."*

AN EDUCATED TASTE

by MARALYN HORSDAL

I had just finished napping the ham mousse with Madeira sauce for table two when Dominique, my head waiter, appeared at my side. His real name is Arthur, and he is really my only waiter, but he feels his name and title add a certain cachet to my restaurant.

"Wendy, the Campbells want a bottle of the Pommard with their dinner."

"They must be celebrating something," I answered, wiping a bit of sauce off the edge of the plate. "O.K. I'll nip right down and get it. Here's the mousse for table two."

I always keep the key to the wine cellar, with my other keys, in my apron pocket; the wine stock is a major part of my investment in this enterprise and I don't take any chances. Switching on the light, I went carefully down the cellar stairs. The wine cellar is lovely, my pride and joy. There's a delicious, slightly musty, out-of-

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this-century feeling to it, with the shelves of case lots all around the old stone walls. Even after having the business for two years, I still contemplate the wine cellar with delight—and possibly a bit of smugness.

I haven't always been either a businesswoman or a cook, and had it not been for two more or less unrelated events I might still not be either.

The first event was that I went to Europe. I had done a degree in art history and worked for three years at quite a good museum when I felt the urge to see more than North America. I went to Europe, planning to stay a year. However, I was so entranced with all the different foods, especially Italian and French (as well as the art galleries and museums), that I enrolled in several cooking schools and stayed away several years.

The second event was that a little while after I came home my uncle died. He has been passionately interested in food and wine, and evidently considering that I showed the greatest promise in the family of continuing his two pet obsessions he left me his wine cellar. It wasn't large but it had been chosen with exquisite taste, particularly in the Bordeaux. I had been thinking vaguely of opening a small restaurant and this unexpected windfall decided the matter. I've added to the stocks, but we are still drinking the excellent wines laid down by my uncle.

So started my tiny, eight-table Restaurant Wendy. I and one occasional helper do all the cooking and Dominique—Arthur—waits on table. I had expected it to be hard work and it is, but now I finally have a good reputation, a modest profit and a regular clientele.

As I reached for a Pommard 1972 my eyes lit on a case of Chateau Lascombes. A shock ran through me. I was sure I had only served one bottle of it ever, but there were two empty slots gazing at me. In the course of a busy evening I can't remember every bottle that's used, so I keep scrupulous records. I made a mental note to check later. But on my way back out I received another, far greater shock. My own personal bottle of Burmester's 1970 port was gone!

This time there was no doubt. It had been a Christmas present from a fellow port lover, and it wasn't due to be opened until 1985, so I knew I hadn't used it. But who could have taken it? I always have the key and nobody came down to the wine cellar except with me. I hadn't noticed before that anything was missing. But I didn't have reason to come to where the really special wines were kept all that often.

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There were diners waiting and I couldn't stop everything to launch an immediate investigation. I'd have to come back down later and see if any further nasty surprises lay in store.

Back in the kitchen, I locked the cellar door and handed the Pommard to Dominique, hoping I didn't look as shaken as I felt. Then I turned to the order from the first window table, a new couple. First, a slice of pâté for each of them.

Three entrées are served each evening. One is fussy—this was the hot ham mousse with Madeira sauce. One is a make-ahead, slow-cooking dish, such as daube of beef or a roast; tonight it was a glorious ragout of beef. The third is usually fish or seafood, depending on what is fresh in the market that day; tonight's was sole sautéed in lemon butter. The vegetables are always fresh, dictated by the time of year, and I make the soups, pâtés, and bread, the house mustard and mayonnaise. Some of the pickles and chutneys I make, but the rest I buy homemade from people I know. I think people deserve to eat specially-made condiments and accompaniments as well as the main dishes. Anyone can have the packaged stuff at home.

For dessert, I sometimes make rich things like cheesecake, but many of my customers tend to prefer fruit and a good selection of cheeses. I keep a supply of homemade ice cream and sherbets in the freezer for those with a craving for something sweet. It is a great pity that I wasn't born the willowy type so I could eat all I want and stay slim. As it is, with the amount of tasting and testing I do, I'm always trying to lose about twelve pounds. I have no doubt my views on dessert are colored by this unhappy fact.

We were busy that evening, so I didn't have time to brood on the problem of the missing wine. When the last dessert had been consumed, and the last coffee and brandy served, Dominique and I sat down in the kitchen. There were still two tables lingering, and I don't like waiters who hover around like nesting robins. We each had a glass of our house red—a Côtes du Rhone—and evaluated the evening.

"Everybody liked the new pâté," Dominique said. "Maybe it was the tiny bit of anchovy in it."

"Could be," I answered. "I wasn't too sure about that but I saw it in a Danish recipe and thought it was worth a try." I wondered if I should mention the missing wine. No. I still wasn't sure what was gone—and besides, horrible as it was to suppose, maybe Dominique

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was taking it. I didn't see how he could and didn't think that he would, but the ugly possibility existed. *Somebody* was taking it.

"The Madeira sauce was perhaps a tad too sweet," Dominique went on, "but the ham was smoky enough to take care of it."

"I think you're right," I said. "I'll add a note to the sauce card. Maybe Helen likes it sweeter than we do."

Helen McAllum was my occasional assistant in the kitchen. I can't afford, and usually don't need, help but Helen is an older married woman who lives nearby, loves to cook, and always wants to make herself a little money. I ask her to come in for a few hours when it looks as though we're going to be especially busy. She had been in earlier tonight and had started the sauce.

Maybe it was Helen who was making off with my wine, I thought. But she too seemed unlikely. Her husband was a well placed executive and could afford to buy them all the wine they wanted.

"Remember the time I got caught for shoplifting?" Dominique asked.

"What?" I said, startled.

"Remember when you hired me I told you I'd been caught shoplifting when I was in high school?"

"Oh. Yes. What about it?"

"The manager of the store was here tonight. He really liked the sole."

"Did he recognize you?"

"I don't think so. It was a long time ago." He thought about it. "I deserved to get caught. And I've been straight ever since." Have you now, I wondered. Surely he wouldn't have reminded me of the shoplifting episode if he was stealing the wine. Unless he was trying to throw me off the scent.

I finished my wine, then heaved myself up from the table and began putting the last load of dishes into the dishwasher. Dominique peered out into the dining room.

"Oh, good," he said, and went out. I gathered that our last patrons had decided to leave.

The next morning I was back early, lugging all my wine records, and I made a thorough check. The loss was awful—much worse than I'd thought. There were not only quite a few bottles missing, but whoever was taking them had excellent taste. He or she—*it*, I thought grimly—was taking the best wines I had. Most were bottles

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from my uncle's cellar, and almost all of it—like my port—wouldn't be ready to drink for a while yet.

So much for buying for the future! One of the Chateau Calon-Segur 1961, a wonderful wine that is still improving, was gone. So were a Chateau Lynch-Bages 1975 I hadn't planned to open for at least another year and a Chateau Leoville-Barton I've been serving but has another five or six good years yet. There were others. Why hadn't whoever it was walked off with one of the remaining Chateau LaFleur-Petrus '64? It has been excellent but is getting a little past its prime. The thief was obviously looking forward to years of drinking pleasure—at my expense. I was furious. And I was going to get my wine back!

There seemed little point in calling the police. Even if they did eventually figure out who the culprit was, he or she would have plenty of warning, wth them around, to get rid of the evidence. All that lovely wine, either gulped down too early or—horror of horrors—poured down a drain. I couldn't bear that. No, I was going to have to catch the thief by myself and bring my wine safely home.

I went upstairs to the kitchen and made coffee. As I was pouring myself a cup, Alcinda, my cleaning lady, a Portuguese woman of great energy and charm, came bustling through the door. "Alcinda," I asked her. "When you were growing up in Portugal, did you drink much wine?"

"Oh, yes," she beamed. "My father had a *vinha,* a vineyard. In our house there was always wine on the table. My father's *maduro* was very sought after. He would age the good wine maybe fifteen years. It had the bouquet of a good Bordeaux. People paid much for it. Of course, we did not drink *that* wine every day. Even for our celebrations we didn't. The younger wine, maybe four years old, was also good, so we would drink that. At my wedding we drank many bottles!" She laughed, then, with a far-away look in her eyes, she sighed. "Ah, but my husband is now laid off again. I must get to my work."

That afternoon I had trouble concentrating on what I was doing. The night's menu consisted of boned chicken breasts in puff pastry—sort of a Chicken Wellington, if that's not a contradiction in terms—grilled flank steak that had been marinated with lots of pepper, and red snapper sautéed with mushrooms and strewn with a few capers. The starters were a light cream-of-carrot soup with a hint of fresh ginger, celery-root remoulade, and sliced hot ham

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quiche. Even in a restaurant it can take a long time to use up a whole ham.

As I chopped and stirred, I kept wondering why someone would steal the wine. The thief was clearly knowledgeable about wine, but that implied someone with plenty of money. Maybe the person had been rich and had fallen on "evil days." Maybe he or she just enjoyed the adventure of breaking in at night. My wine cellar was becoming pretty well known, so the gloomy possibility existed that the thief could be someone I didn't even know.

Even if I could figure out "who," the more important question was "how?" I wanted my wine back. I needed to catch the person red-handed (ha!) but I obviously couldn't secrete myself in the cellar every night and day until the thief struck again. Maybe if I spread some kind of invisible powder or ink around, the kind that would later turn a violent purple color—but I might not see the guilty person until after the stains wore off, if then. What about hiding a dog in the cellar? Well, if the thief was someone who was around much I couldn't keep it a secret for long. Change the lock? That might stop the thefts, but it wouldn't get me my wine back. What if I rigged up a flash camera and got a picture of the startled snatcher? He or she could go home and destroy the evidence.

There had to be a solution. Fingerprint powder on the doorknob? If my prowler wasn't a known criminal, fingerprints wouldn't help. Fix a huge net on the ceiling that would quietly drop and encase the sneak? My brain was obviously getting tired. Besides, I would most likely trip on the trigger thread myself and be swathed in acres of netting.

Ouch! I nicked my thumb slicing a carrot and dragged my concentration back to the more immediate problem of pleasing the evening's diners.

Dominique arrived and began setting the tables, breezing back and forth between the kitchen and dining room.

"The soup smells divine," he said. "What are you going to garnish it with?"

"I thought a sprinkle of chives or parsley. Or snipped carrot tops are pretty. What do you think?"

He considered. "The carrot tops. People might not think of them at home. What wine do you want me to suggest with the chicken? A Chablis would be nice. It could hold its own with those flavors. Or do we have lots of Vouvray?"

I froze. Why did he want to know?

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"I'll go and check," I said and headed for the cellar. It was a perfectly normal question for Dominique to ask and I would have to stop jumping and gaping every time wine was mentioned in my presence. Anyway, even though Vouvray is a long-lived wine, the thief's taste didn't seem to run to whites.

I found the rack with the Loire whites and stood gazing at the bottle tops, all there and facing quietly forward. Suddenly an idea flashed into my mind. Suppose I had something really good in stock in a limited quantity. Surely he or she would want some. I could lay a little trap and prod the rat into action at a specific time. I hurried back upstairs in a far more cheerful mood.

"Yes, there's lots left," I positively carolled. "Recommend away all you like."

While I boned the chicken breasts—I've always thought the term should surely be "deboned"—I worked on a plan.

How could I get word of the lure to my quarry? If it was someone here, mentioning it would be enough. But what if it was some unknown person who had conceived a passion for my wine stock—maybe someone who had known my uncle? As I prepared one dish after another I mused over the possibilities. By the time the first customers arrived, I had it.

I would announce, maybe in the paper, that I would be receiving a small stock of something terrific—after first finding out what I *could* get—then I would state that I would have a special dinner for interested parties, to honor and partake of the special wine. None of it would be served before the special night and I would make the announcement only a few days before the event.

My unwelcome visitor would then, surely, attempt to get some of the wine. I could manage a couple of days and nights on guard. Two hitches were that the intended quarry might not get the message and that hiding in the cellar might be terrifying. But I would have to try. It was the best plan my tired brain could devise.

We were busier than the reservations had indicated, so I phoned Helen and asked if she could pop over for an hour or two. She could, and even stayed to help with the clean-up. When we were through we both collapsed at the big wooden table with a glass of wine and the last slices of the ham quiche.

"Yum," Helen said. "Is that tarragon I taste?"

"Tarragon and a little mustard. It sets the ham off nicely, doesn't it? Dill instead of tarragon is nice, too."

Dominique came in, pretending to stagger with fatigue. "That was

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a busy one!" he exclaimed. "I wonder why some nights, with the same number of people, seem so frantic and other nights so pleasant."

"Maybe it just depends on what kind of mood you're in."

"What moods? You know I'm never moody." He grinned and joined us at the table. It was true he wasn't moody. But he *did* like wine and I couldn't pay him a big salary—was he pilfering a good bottle now and then to even things up? The white-collar-crime syndrome in a different setting?

Helen was giving an account of her niece's wedding the previous weekend. I was only half listening.

"But weddings are such bunk," she said. "Marriage, too. I tried to tell her that, but she's in love. Oh, well, we only get one shot at this life—she should get what she wants if she wants it. Anyway, the champagne was very good."

I pricked up my ears. Wine again. "What did they serve?" I asked.

"A vintage Veuve Clicquot! I think it was a 1973," she replied. "My sister's husband knows his champagnes."

Well, I thought, I hadn't realized Helen had such an educated taste in champagne.

"Does your husband like champagne, too?" I asked.

She sniffed. "No. He only drinks Scotch. Well, I guess I'll be off." She eased herself out of her chair and smiled at me in such a friendly way I felt guilty about my suspicion.

The next day I drafted my little announcement of the special dinner and went off to the wine merchants to see what prize lure I could buy. With great good luck, if some stress on my purse-strings, I acquired two cases of 1970 Chateau d'Angludet, a Médoc with a most respectable name I doubted the thief would be able to resist.

Then I planned the dinner. A fancy beef dish would be excellent with the wine, so I decided to feature Tournedos Henri IV, a sinfully delicious version with artichoke hearts, Béarnaise sauce, and Madeira. The preceding dishes would be light: a vegetable terrine, a highly regarded fish soup that's a delicious mixture of several kinds of fish, onions, celery, green pepper, thyme, basil, and wine. For vegetables and salad I would have to wait and see what was fresh, and for dessert I would rise to something luxurious to do honor to the wine—a many-layered cake with butter-cream fillings, perhaps.

I put the announcement in the paper and also posted it in the dining room, carefully stating that I'd be receiving the wine shortly

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before the dinner one week hence—this so that the thief, assuming he or she rose to the bait at all, would make his or her attempt on only a few nights.

Two days before the dinner, I took a camp bed, sleeping bag, and various necessities into the root cellar, which opens off the wine cellar. It has no windows, so I could turn on my flashlight without being seen from outside.

As I emerged from the cellar after stowing my goods, the landlord, Ian Mackenzie, knocked at the door.

"Hi there, Miss Marlowe," he grinned. "I had to fix a window in the office upstairs so I thought I'd look in on you. Is everything going okay? How's business?"

Oh oh, I thought, he wants to raise the rent. "It's not bad," I conceded, "but I'm no millionaire yet. Would you like some coffee?" Always be nice to your landlord.

"Sure thing, thank you." He sat down and remarked, "I must bring the wife in for dinner sometime."

"Oh, yes, do," I replied, pouring the coffee.

"We don't go much for fancy food and wine though, you know."

"I often serve quite plain things," I said, "and our house wines aren't fancy."

"I'm more of a beer drinker, myself," he said, and indeed he did have the build of a man who likes his beer. Then I realized: this man owned the building and here he was taking special pains to tell me he liked beer better than wine. He hardly ever dropped in like this. When he left after finishing his coffee I wondered speculatively after him.

I was very nervous that evening, jumping at the slightest unusual sound—a sudden burst of laughter, the slam of a door. I broke a sherry glass and a side plate, and couldn't eat dinner myself. In the brightly lit kitchen, my scheme of hiding among the turnips seemed perfectly ludicrous. What would I do if I were faced with a gun? What if I fell asleep and didn't hear an intruder? It was entirely possible—I had slept through an earthquake once.

When the patrons finally departed, Dominique and I had our usual end-of-the-evening chat and then he left, too. The moment had come.

I turned off all the lights, locked the doors, and tiptoed down into the cellar. Because of my penchant for heavy sleep, I set a pile of empty plastic egg cartons on the top step, where they would likely be kicked by the thief and tumble noisily to the cement floor below.

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I closed the door into the wine cellar all but a crack, tucked myself into my sleeping bag, and turned off the flashlight. After a while, I drifted off, trusting the egg-carton ploy would work.

When I woke up at seven, nothing had disturbed my slumbers. I hurried to the stairs. The egg cartons were still in place. At first relieved that I hadn't slept through a theft, I then realized it meant another night in the root cellar, and another day on tenterhooks.

The menu I'd planned for that evening was boned breast of veal stuffed with spinach, rice, and cheese; poached salmon with cucumber-dill sauce; and a steak grilled to order. I had expected I wouldn't be up to anything complicated, whether I had landed my prey or not, and I was right. My mind remained on the problem all evening. I still couldn't believe anyone I knew would take what they wanted from me simply because they wanted it. Then, just as I was serving the last of the entrées, I remembered a comment that had been made to me and I knew who had been taking my wine.

When I had sent out the last desserts, my usual feeling of exhausted exhilaration didn't come. When Dominique left, I turned off the lights and returned to the root cellar.

I had managed to doze off when down came the egg cartons. My heart gave a huge leap and I sat up, frozen.

Silence. Then light footsteps very slowly started down. I waited in the dark. A flashlight beam became visible at the bottom of the stairs and turned toward the wine racks.

I slid quietly out of the bag and to my feet, pulled open the door, and turned on the lights. "Helen!"

She screamed and dropped her flashlight. Her hands flew up to cover her face.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

Slowly her hands came away from her face and she started to cry.

"Come on, Helen," I said firmly, "let's go upstairs and talk about it."

"Sit down," I told her, "and tell me why you've been stealing my wine."

Helen put her elbows on the table and leaned her forehead on her hand. She still hadn't looked at me.

"All right then," I said. "Let me guess. Your husband makes plenty of money, but he doesn't give you enough of it. He likes only Scotch. You love wine but you can't afford it, so you started helping yourself

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to my cellar. The other night you said we only get one shot in life and your niece should get what she wants even if it *is* marriage—which you seem to think little of."

"Yes," she said dully. "My husband says if I like wine so much I can buy it for myself."

"I'm sorry for your troubles," I told her, "but I can't let you get away with stealing my good wine."

She winced when I said "stealing."

"I know. I never meant to take any at first. Then I found myself thinking how lovely it would be to have my own little supply, each bottle getting better and better."

I knew the feeling. "But what was your husband going to think when you started taking it out and drinking it?"

"He'd never have known. We're splitting up. He's leaving. It was something I could look forward to, that wine."

I was sorry for her but too angry to say so. "How did you get into the cellar anyway?"

"I got a key made. One day you went off to the bank in a hurry. I know you keep the key in your apron pocket, so I just took it and had another one cut before you got back." She looked at me. We stared at each other. "Are you going to call the police?" she asked.

"I don't know yet," I told her. "Where's the wine?"

"In a cupboard in my basement. I've been keeping it the right temperature and horizontal and everything."

"We'll go and get it," I said.

"Now? It must be two o'clock. What if my family wakes up?"

"It's either them or the police," I said. "But first—" I got up, rummaged in the ledger drawer for some paper and a pen, and gave it to her. "Here. I want you to write out a statement saying you took so many bottles of wine from my cellar over so long a time and how you got the key. Take your time. And say that tonight I caught you at it and that's why you're writing the confession."

I sat back while she wrote. Suddenly I was exhausted, a reaction to the tension no doubt. I need a glass of wine, I thought. Helen could probably use one too. Struggling to my feet, I went to the house-wine cupboard, took out a bottle, and put it on the table.

Helen looked at it.

"I think we both need a drink," I said, going for wine glasses.

When she finished writing and signing the statement, I poured the wine and we started to drink. I read over what she'd written, then I wrote at the bottom of the page: "As long as Helen McAllum

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never steals anything else, I will not reveal this statement to anyone. If she does, I shall take it to the police immediately." I co-signed it, dated it, and let her read my addition. It might not hold water in court but it was the best leverage I could think of.

"Thank you," she said. "It's more than I deserve."

We agreed that she would give me a week's notice to find someone else who could come in part-time. Her story would be that she needed more time at home. I'd miss her but it would be difficult for us both to keep her around. As I said to Dominique when we discussed her leaving the next day, "Maybe it's just as well for everybody to take stock and make changes now and then."

He didn't know all the nuances of my statement, of course, and I went on making the buttercream for the dessert for the dinner for the wine that had helped me catch a thief.

"Q"

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beginning a *NEW* series by

MICHAEL GILBERT

Shackleton wasn't a fashionable resort like its neighbors, Brighton and Hove, but it was clearly quite a prosperous place. A marketing center, Jonas Pickett guessed, for the agricultural hinterland. A lot of small hotels and decent-looking boarding houses. There would be two different populations—the visitors who crowded the place in the summer months and the local residents who lived on the money they brought.

One house on the High Street, rather bigger than the others, was set back behind a small paved courtyard. It was a Georgian building with bow windows, three white steps up to the front door, and a dolphin bell-pull. Sam had got the plate up already, Jonas saw.

Jonas Pickett, Solicitor and Commissioner for Oaths . . .

ANYTHING FOR A QUIET LIFE

by MICHAEL GILBERT

During the first month there were no clients, but a lot of callers. Men who came to put the finishing touches to Jonas's flat and men with filing cabinets and desks to complete the fitting out of the office. One whole morning was occupied with the installation of an impressive safe. Traveling salesmen called hoping to sell them office accessories. They were mostly sent away empty-handed by Sam Conybeare. They didn't stop to argue. Sam was a mountain of a man who had once performed remarkable feats of strength in a circus. Jonas had rescued him from his wife, who was nagging him to death, and he had devoted himself to Jonas's welfare ever since.

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People dropped in to pass the time of day. Thirty years of legal practice in the South of England had given Jonas a wide circle of acquaintances. Among the first to arrive was Major Appleby, the headmaster of St. Oswald's, one of the three preparatory schools in the neighborhood. He told Jonas, "There used to be eight when I started here after the war. Times are getting harder every day. If I have to shut up shop, you shall handle the sale." Jonas thanked him and said he hoped it wouldn't happen.

Their first professional visitor was not a client. He arrived on a Monday morning in the middle of July. He introduced himself to Claire, who examined his card, which identified him as Christopher Clover of Smallpiece & Clover, Solicitors, whilst he examined Claire with approval. She was worth looking at.

She said, "Shall I tell Mr. Pickett what it is you want to see him about?"

"Just a friendly visit. One professional man to another. If he's busy I could come back."

"I'll find out," said Claire, in the cool voice which matched her appearance.

Jonas said, "Of course. Show him in. Ask him if he'd like a cup of coffee."

Mr. Clover said he would just love a cup of coffee, and what a lovely old house it was, wasn't it?

Jonas had brought down some of the furniture from his office in London. There were chairs upholstered in red leather. There was a huge rolltop desk occupying the space in front of the bow window. On the walls there were portraits, in oil, of severe-looking legal gentlemen. The general effect was undeniably impressive. It certainly impressed young Mr. Clover.

He looked at the pile of dockets and papers on the desk and said, "Well, you seem to be busy. Perhaps I oughtn't to be interrupting you."

"Don't be misled," said Jonas. "These are hangovers from my previous practice up in London. The young gentlemen I bequeathed it to find there are some matters they still need help with. I see from your card you're in practice here yourself. That's good. You can give me your professional view of Shackleton."

"Well," said Mr. Clover, "it's a nice place. Splendid climate, and friendly people. But legally, I should say it's pretty tightly tied up."

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"I'm glad to hear it," said Jonas. "I didn't come here to work myself to death."

Mr. Clover looked at him doubtfully. He said, "Well, we've been here for two years, and I don't mind telling you it was hard grafting at first."

"Who's the opposition?"

"Well, Porter and Merriman look after the nobs. I mean, people like Sir James Carway and Admiral Fairlie and old Mrs. Summers. R. and L. Sykes handle most of the litigation. That's the local bench, and the County Court at Brighton. Bledisloes do the commercial and company work, such as it is."

"I don't suppose that I shall cross swords with any of them," said Jonas. "My specialities are Bills of Exchange, Copyright, and Patents. And Church property. Particularly Welsh Church property. A curiously complicated field since Disestablishment." Thinking that he detected a look of relief in young Mr. Clover's eye, he added maliciously, "Of course, nowadays one must be prepared to tackle anything. My partner, Mrs. Mountjoy, seems to revel in the run-of-the-mill stuff."

After Christopher Clover had left, Claire put her head round the door and said, "I may have got a client for you."

"What sort of client?" said Jonas cautiously.

"He's a young man—not all that young really. Youngish. I met him at the tennis club. When I first joined he was new too, so we arranged a few singles."

"Very natural," said Jonas.

Claire looked at him suspiciously, then she said, "He's not the sort of man who talks a lot, but I gathered that he's down here for the summer, living in a trailer. He was in that big trailer park beyond the golf course, out on the Portsmouth road. But he had to get out two or three days ago. There was some trouble."

"What sort of trouble?"

"The person who told me about it didn't really know. But the police turned up and there was a bit of an argument. When I next saw him at the club I said if he needed a lawyer he'd better come and see you."

"Has he a name?"

"His name's Rowe. Dick Rowe."

"And did he say when he proposed to call?"

"I think," said Claire, who was looking out of the window, "that that's him coming now."

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"Then we had better admit him."

He wrote on the pad in front of him "Rowe," "trailer," and "trouble?".

At the moment Claire opened the front door and ushered Mr. Rowe into the reception room, the door on the far side opened also and Mrs. Mountjoy came out, followed by her bad-tempered rough-haired Scots Terrier, Bruce. "Like owner, like dog," Jonas used to say, which was unfair to Sabrina. True, she favored an untidy hairstyle, but she was more abrupt than bad-tempered.

Bruce growled at the newcomer, and then made a dart for his ankles. Instead of retreating, Mr. Rowe bent down and scooped Bruce up with a firm hand under each of his forelegs. Bruce looked disapproving. This was not the reaction he had expected. Mr. Rowe held him for a moment, moving the fingers of his left hand. Then he said, "Yes. I thought I noticed a slight stiffness. There's a lump under his right foreleg."

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Mountjoy. "You don't mean—"

"Not serious. Not yet, anyway. But you ought to have it cut out. A vet would do it with a local anesthetic."

He put down Bruce, who scuttled back behind Mrs. Mountjoy and glared at the newcomer through the tangles of his hair. Claire said, "Better come in, Dick, before he changes his mind." She ushered Mr. Rowe into Jonas's room, and closed the door behind him.

"And who in the world is that?" said Mrs. Mountjoy.

"That," said Claire, "is our first client."

The description which occurred to Jonas when he saw Rowe was "average." He was of average height, of average build, and had a very average face. He saw what Claire had meant when she had first said "young" and then corrected it to "youngish." Rowe certainly gave a general impression of youth, but where a young man's face is open, and lit with the joyful expectation of what life has to offer, this face was closed. It was more than closed. It was sealed.

"Sit down, please," said Jonas. "My secretary tells me that you had some problem."

"Problem?" said Rowe. "Not that I'm aware of. I just wanted to make a will."

"That shouldn't be too difficult." Jonas ran over in his mind the details he needed. "First I'd better have your full name."

"Richard Athelston Rowe."

"And address."

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"Since my movements are uncertain, it had better be my London Bank. The London and Home Counties Bank."

"Right." Jonas scribbled busily. "Executors?"

"The Bank has agreed to act as my executors."

"Splendid. Then the next thing is, who are to be the beneficiaries?"

"I wish to leave everything to Claire Rayner."

Jonas had almost written this down before the impact of it struck him.

He said, "You mean my secretary?"

"Yes." And, as Jonas paused, "Is there some difficulty?"

"If you had wanted to bequeath your estate to me," said Jonas with a smile, "there would have been considerable difficulty. Solicitors aren't supposed to draw up wills in favor of themselves. But members of their staff? I suppose there's no objection."

"Good."

Jonas still hesitated. Then he said, "You mustn't think me impertinent, but I gather that you have only known Miss Rayner for a month. Are there not other people, members of your own family—?"

"I have no family."

"None at all?"

"None at all. I am unmarried. My father and mother are dead. They were only children. I have no brothers or sisters. I understood that if I died without a will my property would go to the state. That seemed to me to be one good reason—" a very slight smile twitched the corner of his mouth "—for making a will."

The accent was puzzling. There was the faint suspicion of a brogue, allied to a broadening of the vowels which Jonas associated with educated Americans. He said, "You must excuse me for having been startled by your proposal. In the way you put it, it seems quite logical. Might I ask if Miss Rayner is aware of your intentions?"

"No. And I see no reason to inform her. Unless—" again that very slight smile "—my will should become effective. If that happens, of course she'll have to know."

"Then it will take a little longer, because I shall have to type it myself. When it's ready, where shall I get in touch with you?"

There was a slight pause before Rowe said, "As I mentioned just now, my future movements are a bit uncertain. Could I call on you to sign the will in three days' time? Say Thursday morning, about midday."

"That should be sufficient time even for an inexpert typist like myself," said Jonas.

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Later that day he discussed their client with Sabrina Mountjoy, from whom he had no secrets.

"He's certainly got his wits about him," she said. "I mean, noticing that Bruce was limping, and diagnosing what was wrong with him. I saw the vet at lunchtime, and he's going to operate this evening."

"He struck me as a remarkable man altogether" said Jonas. "A man with no family, no face, and a curious reluctance to disclose his present address. Although, as it happens, I think I know it."

"How come?"

"When old Major Appleby, of St. Oswald's, came to see me last Thursday, he mentioned that a stranger had called on him and asked permission to park his trailer for a few weeks in the spinney at the far end of their football field. From his description, I think it was Rowe. He liked him and was prepared to say yes, but was worried about local authority repercussions."

"What did you tell him?"

"I said that out of sight was out of mind."

"That doesn't sound to me like legal advice."

"I didn't charge him for it," said Jonas.

As Mrs. Mountjoy was going, she said, "I've just realized it. Of course, your new client doesn't exist."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"He's a legal fiction. Don't you remember? John Doe and Richard Roe."

She departed, cackling. Jonas started to type.

That was on Monday.

On Tuesday night Jonas slept badly. This was something that happened about once a month. Jonas thought it might be something to do with the weather. The first heavy storm since their arrival had swept up the Channel that afternoon, and it had been raining on and off ever since. After a few hours of dozing, he was jerked back to wakefulness by the feeling that something was wrong.

The rain had stopped, the clouds had blown off, the stars were showing, and the night was very still. What he had heard had been a sharp crack, and it had come from somewhere below him. He looked at his watch. Half past two. He got up and sat for a moment on the edge of his bed, thinking. Then he pulled on a sweater, pushed his feet into a pair of old slippers, and started downstairs.

His living quarters were on two floors—bedroom and bathroom

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above, dining room, kitchen, and living room below. He went into the dining room, which was immediately above his own office. There was no repetition of the crack which had woken him, but he could hear a succession of much smaller noises which suggested that someone was moving about. He hesitated no longer. He had no great opinion of burglars—mostly they were cowardly people whose one idea, if disturbed, was to get away. There was a poker in the fireplace. Jonas picked it up and made his way down to the hall.

Definitely someone in his office. Now he could hear a desk drawer being opened and shut. The crack which had woken him must have been made when the intruder forced the front of the desk. He threw open the office door and clicked down the switch.

No result. Bulb taken out? In the half light through the bow window, he could make out the figure of a man behind the desk, who had been using a torch which he switched off as Jonas appeared. For a moment nothing happened. Then, to Jonas's relief, he heard steps coming up from the basement. Sam was joining the action.

Jonas said, "You'd better come quietly. There are two of us."

The man was out from behind the desk by now. He advanced toward Jonas steadily and without speaking. As Jonas swung the poker, something hit him with horrid force in the muscle of his right arm. He dropped the poker. A knee drove into the bottom of his stomach. As he went down, crowing for breath, the door at the back of the room opened and Sam appeared, outlined against the light from the passage behind. The intruder hurdled Jonas, reached the hall door three steps ahead of Sam, jerked it open, and made for the front gate, where a car stood, parked without lights. At the gate he paused for a moment.

Jonas, who had crawled as far as the open front door, croaked out a warning. Whether Sam heard it or would have heeded it if he had is an open question. In fact, at this moment he slipped on the wet flagstones and went down.

There was a soft but unpleasant sound as the gun went off. The bullet went over Sam, who was on his back, through the open door, over Jonas who was on his knees, and smacked into the barometer which hung at the end of the hall.

The next moment the intruder was in the car, which was already moving. By the time Sam had got to his feet and lumbered to the gate it was thirty yards away and going fast.

Jonas said, "Watch it, Sam. Don't let him get another shot at you."

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He had got some of his breath back. The car was disappearing round the far corner.

Sam said, "I wanted to see if I could get his number, but it's covered with mud. Crafty sod."

"We'd better telephone the police."

The policeman who arrived on a bicycle ten minutes later was large and red-haired. He told them his name was Roberts, and it was clear from his manner that he was out to be reassuring. Jonas didn't want to be reassured. He wanted the intruder caught. Roberts said they were probably tough lads from Brighton. People did shoot other people in Brighton. Not in Shackleton. Had anything been taken?

An examination of the office showed that the contents of the desk had been disturbed. Drawers had been opened and papers scattered.

"It's quite mad," said Jonas. "I don't keep money in my desk. I keep it in the bank."

"Maybe he was looking for the key of the safe."

"It's possible. But he'd have been out of luck. I keep it in my bedroom. Hullo!"

"Is something missing, then?"

"The only thing that seems to be missing," said Jonas as he sorted out the mess, "is three sheets of paper. They were my third effort at typing out a will."

"That's a curious thing to steal, sir. However, there doesn't seem to be a lot we can do about it tonight. Why don't you come along in the morning and have a word with the skipper?"

Jonas looked at the pleasant, not over-intelligent face of P. C. Roberts and agreed that it might be well to have a word with his skipper.

Detective Superintendent Queen listened patiently to what Jonas told him. He said, "It's true that we get a few tough characters in here from Brighton and Portsmouth from time to time."

"But what possible interest could they have in the papers in a solicitor's desk?"

"I believe Roberts suggested they might have been looking for the key of the safe."

"Then why did they steal three pieces of paper?"

"Yes," said Queen thoughtfully, "that does seem odd. Were they valuable at all?"

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"Their only value was that they'd taken me an hour to type out. It was a will."

"Very odd. For a local person?" Seeing the look on Jonas's face, he added hastily, "I don't want to know what was in the will, you understand. Just the name. It might give us a lead."

"I suppose there's no harm in mentioning his name. It was a Mr. Richard Rowe. And he's not local. Just a visitor."

As Jonas noted the reaction of Superintendent Queen to this, he suddenly remembered Claire telling him there had been trouble involving the police at the trailer park. He hadn't been clear, from what she had said, if the arrival of the police and Rowe's departure had been connected.

Queen said, "Would you excuse me for a moment, sir," and went out, closing the door behind him. It turned into a long moment. Jonas could hear the rumble of voices from a nearby room. He was beginning to get impatient when Queen reappeared. He said, "I wonder if you would mind coming along and having a word with the boss."

The boss, Jonas gathered, was Chief Superintendent Whaley, head of the uniformed branch of Shackleton. He had already heard a number of things about Whaley, not all of them complimentary. He was a big man, with a strong black moustache and a color in his cheeks that might have indicated short temper or high blood-pressure or both. However, he seemed genial enough and waved Jonas to a chair.

He said, "You're new in Shackleton, Mr. Pickett."

"The very latest thing in lawyers."

"We're always glad to see a London man opening up down here. Shackleton's an expanding place. There should be work for all."

"I hope so," said Jonas.

"We get a lot of cooperation from firms like Porter & Merriman and the Bledisloes."

"I'm glad to hear it." Jonas noted the omission of R. & L. Sykes. If they defended in the Police Court, there could be some natural enmity there.

"It makes things easier all round. After all, you're an officer of the Court. I'm an officer of the law. We're both on the same side."

Jonas thought, he wants something, and is winding himself up to ask for it. Like a clock getting ready to strike.

"The fact is, I'm going to ask you a favor. Rowe came to see you. I gather you were making a will for him."

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"I can't comment on that."

"Of course not. Professional confidence. I understand that. I'm not in the least concerned with how Mr. Rowe planned to dispose of his property. It's only—" it came out with a sudden rush "—do you happen to know his present address?"

"I do," said Jonas.

"Then could you—?"

"I imagine there could be no harm in letting you have it."

"Very kind of you."

"It is care of the London and Home Counties Bank."

The color in Whaley's face deepened slowly. He said, "I think you realize, Mr. Pickett, that that was not what I wanted. I meant his address in Shackleton."

"I'm surprised at you, Superintendent. I couldn't possibly disclose Mr. Rowe's whereabouts without his consent even if—" he paused fractionally, and then said "—even if, as you yourself pointed out, it was not a matter of professional confidence."

There was a long pause. Then the Superintendent said, "Tell me. Why did you change your mind?"

"Did I?"

"What you were going to say was, 'I couldn't tell you Mr. Rowe's address, even if I knew it.' Then you stopped, because it occurred to you that this would not be true. From which I assume that perhaps you do know his address."

"You add mind-reading to your other accomplishments?"

The Superintendent ignored this. He said, "I can't force you to let me have this information, but I have to warn you. It can prove to be a dangerous piece of knowledge."

"And what he meant by that," said Jonas to Claire later that morning, "I haven't the least idea. If the police are after Rowe, knowledge of his whereabouts might be dangerous for *him*. But why should it be dangerous for *me?*"

"Search me," said Claire. "If he wants to find out where Rowe's hiding, why doesn't he get his chaps to do something about it?"

"Such as what?"

"Follow him home from the tennis club."

"I don't know. There's something about this that doesn't add up. I think I'll pay a call on Major Appleby."

St. Oswald's Preparatory School for Boys stood among trees in ten

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acres of smooth Southdown turf. He found the Major in one of the classrooms, correcting exam papers. "You want a word with my caravanner?" Appleby said. "You'll find him in the copse behind the Rifle Range. I warn you, you'll have to look pretty hard. He's tucked himself well away."

Jonas walked through the patch of woodland behind the miniature range without seeing anything but trees and bushes, and had concluded that the headmaster had misdirected him when, on his return journey, he noticed a small fold of netting among the bushes between two trees. Looking closer, he saw that a section of camouflage net had been artfully interwoven with bracken at the bottom and small leafy boughs at the top. Peering through it, he could just make out the shape of the trailer.

A voice behind him said, "Can I help you?"

Rowe had come out from a tree behind which he must have been standing. When Jonas spun round, he said, "Well, if it isn't Mr. Pickett," but there was not much friendliness in his voice.

Jonas opened his briefcase and said, "I've brought you your will. Perhaps you'd like to look it over. If it's what you want we could get Major Appleby and his wife to witness your signature."

Rowe held the will in his hand without looking at it. He said, "Would you tell me how you knew I was here?"

"The Major's an old friend. When he called in on me the other day he mentioned that he had been asked to accommodate a caravanner. I guessed from his description that it was you."

"I see. I hope you didn't pass on that inspired guess to anyone else."

"That's the second time today," said Jonas, "that someone has suggested I might pass on information about one of my clients to third parties. I'm getting a bit tired of it."

Rowe looked at him steadily for a moment and then said, "No. Naturally you wouldn't. Stupid of me. Let's go in and get this business done, shall we?"

The Major was in his study with a young girl and an elderly spaniel. He said, "My wife's out, but my daughter Penelope can act as the second witness. She's over eighteen and said to be of sound mind." Penelope smiled tolerantly and said to Rowe, "I do believe Shandy is better already." Hearing his name, the spaniel thumped his tail on the floor. "It must have been what you said, one of those nasty corn spikes got between his toes."

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Rowe squatted down by the dog and lifted his bandaged paw. The dog did not try to pull it away, but licked his hand.

"It'll be all right now the poison's out," Rowe told her.

When the will had been signed and witnessed, he turned to Jonas and said, "If you'd care to come back to my trailer we'll settle up. Would you like a cup of tea, or is it too early for a drink?"

"Never too early for that," said Jonas.

The trailer was neat and well organized. Jonas said, "I can see you're an old campaigner. You've done a lot of this."

"A fair amount. Water?"

"Just a drop. What are your plans for the future?"

"A bit indefinite. Ice?"

"No, just water."

The warning-off was clear. Don't talk about the past. Don't talk about the future. It rather limited possible subjects of conversation.

But in the end it was Rowe who broke the silence. "I don't know what your methods of bookkeeping are, but could I suggest that you enter this fee I'm paying under some such heading as Sundries or Miscellaneous?"

Jonas thought about it. He said, "Actually, we haven't set up a lot of bookkeeping yet. You're our first client. So I suppose it'll be all right. Very well. You shall be a Sundry."

"Excellent," said Rowe. The faint smile which hardly seemed to penetrate the mask of his face appeared once more. "I think that Sundry is a very appropriate description of me at this precise moment. As I told you, I shall shortly be moving on. I'll try to keep in touch with you. If you don't hear from me after, say, six months, have a word with my bank manager. At the Westminster branch."

Jonas had come to St. Oswald's on foot, and as he walked back to town he was thinking about his first client. Sabrina had called him a legal fiction. He was certainly an elusive character. All Jonas really knew about him was that he seemed to have a talent for dealing with dogs.

It was market day, and the streets of the old town were crowded with cheerful Sussex farmers, their wives, their families, and live and dead stock. When he reached the office, Claire was getting ready to shut up shop. "We had another visitor this afternoon," she said. "A man."

"You don't think—"

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"No. Definitely not the sort of man who would burgle the premises. Rather nice, I thought. Tubby and middle-aged. Name of Calder. He left his card. It's on your desk. He said he might call back later, on the chance of finding you still here."

"Client number two, perhaps," said Jonas. "We're looking up. Where's Sam?"

"He's gone down to the post office. There was a message about some registered packet that's gone astray. I couldn't quite understand what they were saying. Sam's gone down to sort it out."

When Claire had departed, Jonas sat for a moment staring at the card. It wasn't very informative. Middle-aged? Possibly a retired officer. There was the sound of a car drawing up and footsteps on the flagstones of the courtyard. The newcomer came through into the hall, opened the door of Jonas's room, and came in without knocking.

He was neither tubby nor middle-aged. He was large and thick, and moved with the bouncing tread of an athlete. He said, "Don't let's have any trouble. You're an old man. I could hurt you badly and I'll do it if I have to."

Jonas started to say "What on earth—" but got no further. The man came round the desk, caught the end of his tie in one hand and the knot in the other, and started to throttle him. Jonas plucked at the man's hands with his own. He might as well have tried to move a steel clamp. He was fighting for breath and the room was swimming round him. He could see the man's face in a mist. He thought he was smiling.

The pressure relaxed. The man said, "See what I mean? Now come along." He picked up the big ruler from the desk. "If you make any trouble I'll crack both your kneecaps—you won't walk for six months." He linked his left arm with Jonas's right arm and they walked out of the house together. Anyone seeing them would have thought they were very close friends.

They got into the car that was waiting outside, both of them together on the back seat. It looked like the car Jonas had seen driving away the night before. He had recovered control of his voice, and said, as the car moved off, "I suppose it's not the slightest use asking you what all this is about."

"Well, now," said the man, "I can't see any reason not to tell you what our intentions are. It might be sensible, really. Save you from doing anything heroic, like. We're not going to kill you. We're not even going to hurt you, unless we have to. Turn left here, Danny."

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"Then what are you going to do?"

"We're taking you off to a quiet place to ask you a few questions. You give us the right answers, we keep you there long enough to check up that you've told us the truth. Then we let you go. Understood?"

Jonas understood perfectly. They would ask him where Rowe had hidden his trailer. And he would tell them. No doubt about that. Then one of them would go off to find out if he had told them the truth. If he had, they would let him go. Or would they? He rather doubted it. If they intended to let him go, would they have allowed him to see their faces, listen to them talk, note the number of their car? Jonas was surprised to find that he could weigh up the potentialities of the situation as if it was a legal problem concerning one of his clients.

By now they had reached the area of small streets between the Church and the Market. When they swung round to the right, Jonas knew they had taken the wrong turning. That road was a dead end, running up to the Churchyard wall. There were two women standing on the pavement, talking.

The driver said, "We'll have to go back."

"No trouble," said the big man genially. He dipped one hand into his pocket, took out a gun, and pushed the muzzle into Jonas's side so hard it made him gasp. He said, "You do anything stupid and I'll pull the trigger. It won't stop us from getting away, but you won't have any stomach left. Think about it."

Jonas said, "I'm not stupid."

"Stay that way."

The driver had got the car reversed. The two women watched the maneuver incuriously. He drove off slowly, turned out of the street, and headed down a road which, Jonas knew, would bring them out near the marketplace.

Market day, too, thought Jonas. They'll run into trouble there for sure.

The trouble came as they turned the corner. It was a herd of bullocks, driven by a farmer with a red face. He had been in trouble already with the motorists, whose cars were blocking the end of the street. The bullocks were filtering through the barricade, using the pavement on both sides of the cars. One of the bullocks on the offside pavement had just avoided treading on a baby's chair. The woman who owned it was telling the farmer, in pungent Sussex, what she

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thought of him and his bullocks. A sympathetic claque of bystanders were supporting her. One of the cars in the block ahead had started to move.

The driver of Jonas's car turned down the window and said to the farmer, "Shift those bloody cows over, can't you?" There was no hope of backing. A van and a car were already blocking the road behind him. But he had seen that as the rearmost of the cars in front moved he could squeeze past the other two by using the nearside pavement.

The farmer, attacked from a new point, swung round and told the driver what he could do to himself. The driver ignored him. He had already started to edge forward. The gap in front of him was widening. A bullock swerved across his bow. He sounded a blast on his horn.

This was a bad mistake. A frisky Southdown bullock can take just so much and no more. It reared up onto its hind legs, performed a skittering dance, came down alongside the car, and pushed its head through the open window. The big man half rose in his seat. Jonas felt the pistol shift away. He already had his left hand on the door catch. He tugged the door open and rolled out into the gutter.

By this time there was a crowd on both pavements. Two men helped Jonas to his feet. When he looked round, the car had gone, squeezing past the block in front.

"Well," said one of the men. "That's a nice way to treat you. They might have stopped to see if you'd hurt yourself."

"I think they were in too much of a hurry to stop," said Jonas. "Thank you. I'm quite all right now."

A woman said, "Your trousers are going to need a bit of cleaning."

Jonas wasn't worried about his suit. He was glad that he still possessed a stomach.

When he got back to the office he found Sam, angry at having been sent on a pointless errand. "There wasn't no parcel," he said. "And what have you been doing to yourself?"

"It's a long story," said Jonas. "I'll tell you when I've had a bath and changed."

As he was coming downstairs, the front doorbell rang. To Jonas's relief, Sam was there to answer it. He'd had enough of strange callers.

The newcomer was middle-aged and tubby. He looked as if he might have been an Army man. He said, "My name's Calder. I left my card with your secretary. Do you think we could have a word?"

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"Yes," said Jonas. As they went into his office he breathed to Sam, "Stay handy." He was past taking chances.

Mr. Calder looked appreciatively round the room before settling himself down in the visitor's chair. He said, "There was a nasty smash out on the Portsmouth road just now. It'll be on the evening news, I expect." Jonas stared at him.

"The car ran into a road block. Ran into it quite literally, I mean. Tried to crash through it. Silly thing to do. Went out of control, hit a telegraph pole, and caught fire. Two men in it, both dead. I'm sorry about that."

"If it's the men I'm thinking about," said Jonas, "I'm not in the least sorry they're dead."

"I suppose that's understandable," said Mr. Calder. "But *we* were sorry about it. We'd have liked at least one of them more or less undamaged. We had some questions we wanted to ask them."

Jonas wasn't sure whether his visitor's matter-of-fact manner was comforting or alarming. He said, "I suppose we're talking about the same car. The one I got out of."

"Correct. Actually, I'm not quite clear how you did get out of it. I gather there was a bit of a fracas."

"A bullock put his head through the window."

"Very disconcerting," said Mr. Calder, and started to laugh. He suddenly looked much more human. He said, "We owe you an explanation. If I tell you some of the background, you'll realize what it was all about. Dick Rowe's an Ulsterman, but his mother was American and he lived for some time in the States. When his mother and father died, he and his brother came back."

"He said he hadn't got a brother."

"That's right. His brother was shot by the IRA. That's when Dick came to work for us. He posed as an American sympathizer. Helped with running arms and explosives. Got into their confidence. It was information from him that led to the arrest of the people responsible for the last two bomb explosions in London. Very dangerous job. Of course, they got onto him in the end, and we had to pull him out."

Jonas thought about his client. He said, "He did look a bit impassive. Was that plastic surgery?"

"That's right. New face, new identity. We fixed him up with a job in the States. A partnership in a veterinary practice."

"He'd be good at that," said Jonas.

"The trouble is that arrangements like that take time. We have to work through our friends on the other side. Reciprocal assistance.

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Meanwhile, we had to put Dick on ice. He was target number one for the opposition. We thought the best plan was to supply him with a trailer and let him spend the summer here. We chose Shackleton because it looked nice and peaceful."

"That's why I chose it," said Jonas.

"On the off-chance that Dick might need help, we alerted your senior policeman, Chief Superintendent Whaley, to the position. I needn't tell you that he was meant to keep it totally under his hat. But he had to go and tell someone else. In strict confidence, of course. And someone else told someone else."

"The only time I met our Chief Superintendent he didn't strike me as a very discreet sort of person."

"My own boss," said Mr. Calder dispassionately, "who is also Dick's bank manager, has expressed the opinion that Whaley ought to be first skinned and then filleted. He not only talked, he tried to put a police guard on Dick. Thus pointing him out plainly to the opposition."

"That was why he pulled out of the trailer park?"

"He not only pulled out. He sent for us. We've got quite a large team down here at the moment."

"Large enough to organize a road block?"

"Oh, quite," said Mr. Calder with a smile. "I was glad you weren't in the car when it happened. You'd been bothered enough already."

This seemed to Jonas to be an understatement. He said, "I suppose when they burgled my office they were looking for information about Rowe. They thought there might be an address in his will. Which reminds me. I suppose Rowe isn't his real name."

"No. Do you think that might invalidate his will?"

"I suppose it might."

"I *could* give you his real name."

"No," said Jonas firmly. "When he gets to America he can make a new will. And use an American lawyer. I wish him well, but I don't want to know anything more about him."

Claire opened the door. "Sorry. I didn't know you had a visitor."

"It's all right," said Mr. Calder. "I'm just going."

"What is it now?" said Jonas resignedly.

"We've got a new client. A Mr. Batchelor. He's a farmer."

"What's his trouble?"

"I'm not sure if it's trouble or not, but he has discovered that there is buried treasure in one of his fields."

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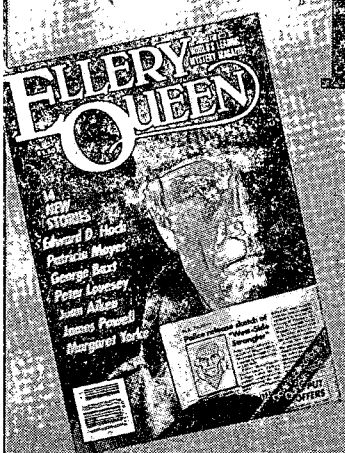

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a *NEW* short story by

GERALD TOMLINSON

DeVore was sick unto death of phoning in 35–0 scores to The Times *so that well-to-do alumni would see Spence College's name in print—if they ignored the alphabetical list of Midwestern winners and scanned the losers' column instead.*

Gerald Tomlinson doing one of the things he does best—a scam story—just for you. And if you like to follow college football, so much the better . . .

SNOOKERED

by GERALD TOMLINSON

At least the alumni didn't stage torchlight parades and burn the coach in effigy. Spence College was too small for that. Not that the alumni, as well as the faculty and students, wouldn't have liked a winning football team. There was plenty of discouragement in all their hearts, which was understandable in view of the fact that the Bulldogs' best record over the past decade was 3–7–1. Even 0–11 seasons were not unknown.

The coach had been around a long time and, despite his dismal performance, was in little danger of losing his job. He smoked the same kind of briar pipe that the revered professor of chemistry did, he went to the fraternities' beer busts, and he seemed to have adjusted well to perpetual defeat.

Mark DeVore had not adjusted well. He saw things differently. DeVore, whose title was Publications Director at the Alumni Office but who also acted as the Sports Information man, was sick unto death of phoning in 35–0 scores to *The Times* so that well-to-do alumni would see Spence College's name in print—if they ignored

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the alphabetical list of Midwestern winners and scanned the losers' column instead.

Ten years out of Spence College himself, DeVore saw little future in his job. While the football coach beamed and guzzled beer, Mark DeVore fumed. He had taken the job as an escape from teaching junior-high-school English. His wife liked the little Ohio college town better than she had liked Cleveland. Everyone at Spence claimed to be pleased with the work DeVore was doing.

But he hated it. He wanted to write, really write, write creatively. Churning out little tan brochures that begged for money held scant appeal for him. Oh, now and then he could do a piece of amusing nostalgia for the alumni newspaper, but on the whole he felt his life was becoming as dull and pointless as the copy he produced. He remembered that H. L. Mencken had written about those who believed "they would have graced a profession far gaudier." That's how DeVore felt.

And then he had an inspiration.

It was not the kind of inspiration that leads one to write *Moby Dick* or even *How To Coach Winning Football.* It was one that led instead to self-satisfaction, to the feeling that there was, after all, something he could control personally.

What he did, shorn of all its embellishments, was to create a football team—an electrifying but imaginary football team. He also created a league. And a star.

The first step was hardly more than a joke. On the Saturday that Spence College lost to tiny, oft-beaten Olander, he picked up the phone, called *The Times,* the Columbus *Bulletin,* and the half dozen others on his regular list, and forthwith reported something happier than the truth. Speaking factually, he would have informed them, "Olander 34, Spence 7." Instead he said, with a certain touch of pride, "Avery College 56, Williamson Tech 0."

Now, a glance at any standard list of American colleges and universities will show you that Avery College doesn't exist. Neither does Williamson Tech. But they sound as if they *could* exist—and, sure enough, come Sunday morning in *The Times,* the *Bulletin,* and other newspapers, they *did* exist. Every sports page picked up DeVore's bogus listing under Midwest, a location he had specified so as to make all their lives easier.

Emboldened by his success, he ignored the Spence Bulldogs' traditional losing effort the next Saturday, too, and gave Avery College

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a comfortable 27–0 win over Braxton A&M. For the final game of the season (he regretted not having developed his team sooner), he phoned in a 44–0 win over Thayer College.

He followed up the Avery-Thayer game with a brief press release, mailed on Avery College stationery ($20.00 for a hundred letterhead sheets and envelopes). He sent this press release, with a post-office-box address, from nearby Wheelersburg. It read: "Avery College, winless at the start of the current season, ended in a blaze of gridiron glory by taking its last three games from strong, favored opponents: Williamson Tech, Braxton A&M, and Thayer College. Coach Tab Howell said most of the credit belongs to a sensational freshman running back, Wayne Snooker, from Bull Shoals, Arkansas. 'He's just phenomenal,' enthused Howell. 'You'll be hearing a lot about him next season.' "

Was Tab ever right.

Avery College started the next season with a 38–0 trouncing of Ligonier College. A three-line press release on Wayne Snooker followed, as well it might. Snooker had rushed for 278 yards.

Two of the newspapers DeVore phoned didn't print his scores, nor did they run his press release. He began to wonder. Had someone checked? He hoped not. This was the first season in quite a long time that he expected to enjoy.

Partial reassurance came in the form of a note from a TV station in Akron. It arrived in the post-office box on Friday just before the Avery College Phantoms' big game with arch-rival Braxton A&M. It said: "Hey, Avery C. No phone? That's what I call small. Who's this Snooker? Available for interview with top Akron sportscaster Bob Rice? Please phone." It was signed "Bob Rice."

"Hey, Bob," he said with breezy assurance. "Mickey Devlin here. Sports publicity for Avery College. Where's Avery, you ask? Southern Ohio, that's where. The Phantoms. Yeah, sure, I know. It's a fairly new school. Mostly West Virginia colleges in the league. Okay, so it's no Oberlin, but never mind the accreditation. Think football. We're in the Monongahela Conference. We're tiny, sure, but, hey Bob, we're coming up in the world. And you should see this guy Snooker. I mean, he's Big Ten caliber. He's just running all over everybody down here. An interview? Uh, well, I don't know, Bob, he's not—let me say this—he's not too articulate. You don't care? Well, if you don't care, if you're willing to interview a bump on a log, sure, why not?"

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They set a time for the interview, three days away.

He had to produce a live body. Fortunately, this guy wouldn't have to say much.

He told his wife there was an annual convention of small-college publicists in Akron and that he'd be staying at Akron's Holiday Inn Downtown for the next two nights.

The drive north on Sunday couldn't have been more pleasant. It was a golden autumn day with a slight bluish haze, the kind of day on which he had been interviewed for his job at Spence College. He sometimes wondered if the weather makes a difference in life-changing decisions like that. If there had been a chilling rain, as there often is during the fall in southern Ohio, would he have finished the interview, slipped into his trenchcoat, pulled on his gloves, and said, "Sorry, but I can do this same kind of work in Chula Vista?"

No matter. He was now a fixture at Spence College, although busily publicizing not the Bulldogs but the Avery College Phantoms along with their backwoods backfield sensation, Wayne Snooker.

All he had to do was find a plausible Wayne Snooker. He had taken three hundred dollars from the Spence petty cash box to cover the trip and the cost of Snooker's TV debut. He knew it was wrong, illegal even, but the mood was on him. The day before, Avery had buried Braxton A&M under a 54–0 score. Although Snooker was billed as a tiger on offense, he seemed to be inspiring the hitherto shaky defense as well. Since Snooker's rise to stardom, not only had he rushed for phenomenal yardage on the Phantoms' behalf, no team had crossed the goal line against the new Avery powerhouse.

After DeVore checked in at the Holiday Inn, he wandered down to the bar to have a martini and a look around. No Snooker there—mostly uptight-looking business types who must have read somewhere that you are what you wear.

He drove to a rundown downtown bar. It was called the Terminal Tavern—appropriately, he thought, because most of the customers looked as if they were lost cases who probably made it their bounden duty to arrive at three in the afternoon and leave at three in the morning. Some were drinking cheap wine, some beer, and a few were putting away boilermakers. It was not the kind of place where you ordered kir or Perrier or a Singapore Sling. DeVore ordered a double shot of bar whiskey. It brought tears to his eyes and fire to his stomach.

He began sorting out the clientele. In general, the gang here was

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too old. Pensioners maybe. Vets on full disability. Some Social-Security graybeards. Not very many recruits for the Avery College Phantoms.

But there were two. One sat four stools down from him and gazed with a wise philosopher's eyes into his muscatel. He couldn't be over twenty-one, but he looked as if he had been studying that vintage for most of his life. He was pink all over, but not baby pink or sissy pink—more like boozehound pink. And even pink, he looked tough.

DeVore walked over to him. "Can I get you a refill?"

"You queer?"

"No. I'm a businessman. I want to talk business."

"If I wanted to talk business, I'd go down to the union hall. Get lost."

"It's worth a hundred dollars for ten minutes' work."

"And a lifetime worrying that my old lady will see the pictures? That it? No thanks, Mac."

At this, DeVore gave up on Kid Pink and tried the guy at the other end of the bar. Number two didn't look a whole lot like his mental picture of Wayne Snooker. He looked more like Lou Costello, but at least he was the right age.

"Mind if I join you?" The stool beside Lou was empty.

"It's a free country."

Lou had a double-shot glass in front of him that he let sit there until the beer chaser arrived. Then he tossed them both off in two flicks of his wrist and used the third flick to point to the two empty glasses. "Barkeep!" A pile of bills crumpled in front of him proved his solvency.

"My name's Mickey Devlin," DeVore said to Lou.

"Is that so? Did I miss you on the *Today* show or something?"

"No, no. Just trying to be friendly. I'm a stranger in town."

"We're all strangers in town, Mick. If we weren't, we'd find other ways to blow our bankrolls."

"Well, let me say this, Mr.—"

"John."

"That's your last name?"

"You writing a biography? The name's John. That's all you need to know to talk to me. Call me John and I'll call you Mick. And if we get tired of talking, we'll clam up."

DeVore thought about trying another bar. John here and Kid Pink down the way were the only two prospects, and they didn't look like solid gold possibilities, but time was a factor to consider. He had to

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find Wayne Snooker tonight. The interview was to be taped at eleven in the morning. He wasn't going to locate a running back after sun-up tomorrow. He needed him now. He decided to stick with John.

"John, I've got a problem."

"Me, too. I drink too much. I'll bet I look sober to you right now, don't I?"

"More or less."

"I'm loop-legged. If I stand up at this precise moment in time, I fall down. Humpty Dumpty. And I'm still ordering boilermakers. What's your problem?"

"I need somebody to go on television for me. To get himself interviewed."

John whistled. "This ain't central casting, Mick. I think you're in the wrong church, wrong pew."

"Don't be so sure. This guy doesn't have to say anything."

"That should be a dynamite interview. Pure TNT."

"This guy I need will be impersonating a football player. A running back, not much of a talker."

"I played football once. Warren G. Harding High. I was no good. Drank too much, I guess." He tossed off the whiskey.

"Look, John. The interview's at eleven in the morning with Bob Rice."

"Bob Rice!" He tossed off the beer.

"Right."

"He's big stuff, Mick. The local sports guru. Who does he think he's interviewing?"

"A football star from a little downstate college."

"What's the scam?"

"The guy in question doesn't exist. There's no such player. I made him up as a joke, after I made up his college. Now I've got to produce him for TV. You interested?"

"You mean I get interviewed by Big Bob Rice? I just nod and smile and say I owe it all to my mom and my kid sister? And, yeah, I can run the hundred in nine flat, but, shucks, half the fellows in Woodchuck Hollow can do the same?"

"John, that's great. You can do it. Just don't ham it up too much. Let me show you this guy's press clippings. His name is Wayne Snooker, by the way. That's really the main thing to remember. But it can't hurt to know all the rest, everything there is to know about him. You can make up more if you want. But it's got to be believable. Otherwise, no hundred bucks."

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"Hundred bucks? Hey, Mick, I was about to do it for nothing. You just watch Wayne Snooker tomorrow. King of the gridiron. Fourteen yards a carry. Now, for tonight, could you just ease me off this stool and maybe hang onto my arm till we hit the cool air?"

"John, I don't want to lose you between now and tomorrow. I think you'd better come back to the Holiday Inn with me and sleep there. I asked for a single, but I got two big double beds. I want to make sure Wayne Snooker is on hand for his big break."

"You're the boss, boss. I'm a valuable property. Hey, I used to have a good arm. Do I ever pass for touchdowns?"

"No. You just run."

"Got it." He sagged as he stood, but DeVore held him upright and walked him, left foot, right foot, left foot, to the car.

Sober, fresh-faced, a little blubbery for a backfield sensation, John No-Name, a.k.a. Wayne Snooker, wowed Bob Rice and the crew at the videotaping session—not to mention Mark DeVore. The guy had read his press clippings in the motel room and he fielded every question well. He embellished his story to a turn. Yes, he was just a poor country boy who picked up running speed as a kid by showing his heels to angry, snorting bulls. His high school was so small they played five-man football—"if you've ever heard of that, Mr. Rice"—and the real star of the team was a big crybaby named Goodykoontz, who was later killed in a car crash while running a load of white lightning down to Little Rock. No, young Snooker didn't have a girl friend, he was too busy getting a good education at Avery College. His ambition was to teach phys. ed. back home in Bull Shoals. A pro career? Naw, he was too little, and—pinching the roll of fat above his belt—he figured he liked the training table too well.

At the end of the interview, Bob Rice congratulated Snooker on the air and then thanked DeVore off the air for bringing his star all the way up to Akron. ("Not articulate?" he whispered, as if the two of them shared some kind of happy secret.)

DeVore said, "They'll like this interview back home in Wheelersburg."

"You tell 'em all down in Wheelersburg I said hello," Rice boomed, turning to greet an angular seven-foot beanstalk who DeVore assumed played basketball.

He pressed a hundred dollars into the palm of his own star, who seemed reluctant to take it. John shook his head, muttering, "That's a snootful of bar whiskey."

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DeVore stayed in Akron overnight and checked out the next morning. He drove south at a leisurely pace. Since Wheelersburg was not far off his route, he decided to look in on the Avery College p.o. box. He didn't expect to find anything but surprises abound. There was a card in the box (blank but beckoning) and two plainclothes policemen hovering nearby.

"Mr. Devlin?"

"You must be mistaken," he said, trying to keep down an unreasoning panic. "My name is Mark DeVore. I have identification."

"Did you know Wayne Snooker?"

He didn't like the sound of that word *did*. "Snooker?"

"There's no need to play-act, Mr. Devlin. Bob Rice can identify you easily enough. He gave us this box number."

"Why?"

"That's what we'd like to know. All we know at the moment is that Wayne Snooker was murdered outside the Terminal Tavern at about two this morning. He was rolled. His wallet, if he had one, is missing. He had no identification."

DeVore started to say, "There's no Wayne Snooker, fellows," but instead found himself asking, "If there was no identification, how did you know who he was?"

Both cops looked incredulous. "That wasn't much of a problem," the older one said. "Half the force saw Snooker on last night's Bob Rice show. As soon as we turned the body over, Cy Jefferson, or maybe it was O'Duffy, says, 'It's him. It's that football player who runs the hundred in nine flat and looks like a butterball. What's his name?'

"O'Duffy says, 'Snooker, isn't it? Zane—no—Wayne Snooker.' "

"So he was rolled," DeVore said. "That's all."

"Your star running back, the great Wayne Snooker, was rolled at the Terminal Tavern in Akron. *That's all?* That's plenty. And where were you, Coach?"

"At the Holiday Inn Downtown."

"Any witnesses?"

Any witnesses? Now there was a poser. DeVore decided to avoid any more snappy comebacks. "Are you arresting me?"

"We're taking you in for questioning, Mr. Devlin. Or is it DeVore? Whichever. Young Snooker said some very strange things at the bar last night. He claimed you were his college coach, his mentor, the man who taught him all he knows about football. Which is practi-

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cally everything. Bob Rice says phooey to all that—you're in publicity. But the little running back, he said you're the Avery College coach, the downstate genius who outbid Arkansas and Ohio State for his services. He said you taught him a vicious trick of the running game, something called the Slashback Maneuver, that can break collarbones like matchsticks. Said he broke a few guys' bones himself—two in last year's games against Williamson Tech."

DeVore said, "I can explain everything."

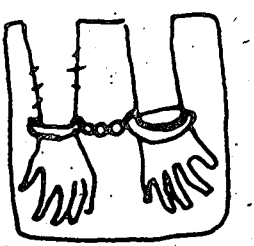
"You can? You think so?" The younger cop sounded doubtful. "Snooker said you'd kill him if he ever got caught boozing it up. It's bad for the wind, he said. Keeps those legs from pumping, too. That's what Cal Miller, the Terminal's bartender, overheard. Cal got quite an earful last night. Your running back really held forth. Bought a few rounds for the regulars."

"Look," DeVore said quietly, "there is no Wayne Snooker. There never was. I made him up."

The cops showed no sign of being impressed.

"There's a body in the Akron Morgue," said the older cop flatly. "He's been identified by a dozen of our men and a TV sportscaster as the football player, Wayne Snooker. Do you think we made *him* up?"

DeVore went with them without argument. He wasn't actually worried—not yet. He could explain. He really could. But it began to look as if the homecoming game with Thayer College would have to be canceled. Too bad. He figured the Avery Phantoms to win it by a thumping 63–0.



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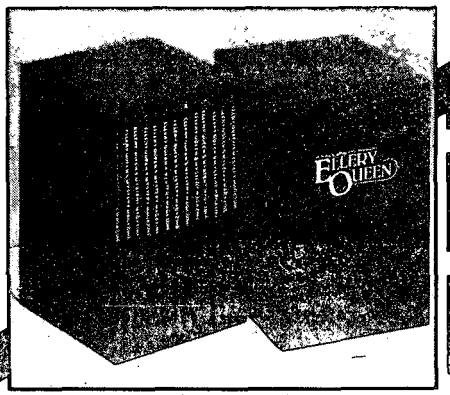

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

HAMMETT & SIMENON: In a 1950 interview, Dashiell Hammett surprisingly named Georges Simenon as his favorite crime writer. It's interesting that we now have new biographies of both men, concentrating as much on their personal lives as on their writing. William F. Nolan's *Hammett: A Life at the Edge* (Congdon & Weed, $16.95) is the better of the two, offering a well rounded portrait of the man and his work. There is much detail about Hammett's marriage, his Hollywood years, and his attempts to write a "serious" novel after publication of *The Thin Man.*

Fenton Bresler's *The Mystery of Georges Simenon* (London: Heinemann/Quixote) examines his writing career spanning some 500 books, but seems more interested in Simenon's claim to have loved 10,000 women. The book reveals that he has not written a novel since 1972, though dozens of early ones —including some Maigrets—remain unpublished here. It's for Simenon fans, and we hope there'll be an American edition soon.

PRIVATE-EYE SURVEY: A recent survey of members of the Private Eye Writers of America and others by University of Kentucky professors Michael T. Nietzel and Robert Baker revealed that only Chandler's Philip Marlowe, Hammett's Sam Spade, and Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer scored 100 percent familiarity among respondents. Among post-1970 writers, Robert Parker's Spenser, Bill Pronzini's "Nameless," and Lawrence Block's Matt Scudder were the most familiar. Full results of the poll will appear in a forthcoming book, *Private Eyes: One Hundred and One Knights.*

Speaking of private eyes, Stanley Ellin has created his first series character with John Milano, the eye in *Star Light, Star Bright,* who reappears in Ellin's *The Dark Fantastic* (Mysterious Press, $13.95).

FIRST NOVEL: My fellow columnist Jon L. Breen has published his first novel, *Listen for the Click* (Walker, $12.95), an engaging mystery set in California racing circles. The book opens with a jockey being shot dead while seated on the bronze statue of a race horse.

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Breen, an Edgar winner for his mystery criticism, pokes gentle fun at some cliches of the genre and still produces a thoroughly satisfying whodunit. We'll be watching for his next.

BOUCHERCON XIV: John D. MacDonald will be Guest of Honor at this year's Bouchercon, to be held October 21–23 at New York's Barbizon Plaza Hotel. Donald E. Westlake and Mary Higgins Clark will be among the speakers, and organizers Chris Steinbrunner and Otto Penzler also plan an original musical, *Murder at the Follies Bouchercon.* Advance registration is $30.00 from Otto Penzler, Bouchercon XIV, 129 West 56th St., New York, NY 10019.

MYSTERY BOOKSHOP: Cambridge, Massachusetts, is the site of a new shop, *Kate's Mystery Bookstore: Murder Under Cover.* Owned by Kate Mattes, formerly of New York's Mysterious Bookshop, the store stocks some 8,000 titles in hardcover and paperback, including a large selection from Allen J. Hubin's library. It's located at 2211 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02140.

WINNER: Stanley Cohen has won first prize in a British short-story contest sponsored by Veuve Clicqot and the London *Times* for his story, "Those Who Appreciate Money Hate To Touch the Principal." It first appeared in the April 1975 issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and was reprinted in the 1975 MWA anthology, *Every Crime in the Book.*

RADIO MYSTERIES: Douglas G. Greene has edited a fine collection of John Dickson Carr's radio mysteries, *The Dead Sleep Lightly* (Doubleday, $11.95). Some of the nine plays use gimmicks familiar to Carr readers, but others are new and all are prime examples of his ingenuity at its best. It's not to be missed.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: The Mysterious Press is greatly expanding its publication schedule, with plans for 15–18 new novels and short-story collections each year. Michael Seidman is editing the line, which will have major bookstore distribution.

International Polygonics is reprinting Margaret Millar's Edgar winner, *Beast in View,* this fall, along with Lillian de la Torre's *Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector.* Over the next few years they plan to publish all the Dr. Sam stories in new editions.

Lawrence Treat has a hardcover book of mystery puzzles, *The Armchair Detective,* coming from Ballantine in November. The same month, Godine publishes *You're the Detective,* a collection of Treat's juvenile mystery puzzles.

Coming this fall from Ungar is *Victorian Masters of Mystery* by Audrey Peterson, containing studies of Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Sheridan Le Fanu, Arthur Conan Doyle, and others.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

At the recent Film Society of Lincoln Center tribute to Laurence Olivier in New York, Glynis Johns recalled how she, as a young player at England's Denham Studios during the legendary days of Alexander Korda, first met Lord Olivier, then at the start of his screen career. She was having lunch at the studio dining room when he entered it. "The whole room lit up. Not only was he the most marvelous-looking man, but there was a special quality emanating from him, an aura that seemed to epitomize *all* the romance and glamor of the movies."

Romance, glamor, and more than a touch of mystery. Olivier from his very beginnings has appeared in a surprising number of melodramas and thrillers. In his first film, *Too Many Crooks* (1930), he played a bewildered playboy dared into committing a burglary who finds his life cluttered with spies and C.I.D. agents—even his girl is not what she seems. Spies also play their part in the witty *Q Planes* (1939), known in this country as *Clouds Over Europe,* in which he was cast as a dashing test pilot tracking down experimental bombers which have disappeared mysteriously during trial flights.

That same year, Samuel Goldwyn imported the actor to America to play Heathcliff in his elaborate production of *Wuthering Heights.* Olivier's performance as the brooding, tormented stableboy haunted by the ghost of his love ("Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this dark alone . . .") won him an Academy Award nomination. The following year he won more fame as the equally dour, tormented Maxim de Winter in Hitchcock's celebrated *Rebecca.*

Also in 1940, the actor appeared in the British *Twenty-One Days,* co-written by Graham Greene from a John Galsworthy play, as a man who accidentally kills the husband of his girl friend. Two years later, he was a French-Canadian trapper murdered by Nazi invaders in *The Invaders* (later retitled *The 49th Parallel),* directed by the great Michael Powell. In 1948, he was striking as *Hamlet,* a Shakespeare drama not without murder elements, in which he both starred and directed for the screen.

In 1953, he starred in two classic melodramas refashioned for the movies. In John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera,* set in London's Eighteenth Century underworld, he was the daredevil Captain Macheath, a dashing highwayman on his way to the gallows. He was also Shakespeare's poisonous, deformed *Richard III,* murdering his way to the throne.

Olivier contributed one of television's most powerful perfor-

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mances in 1961 when he appeared in an adaptation of Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* as a dissolute Latin American priest forced to become a fugitive—George C. Scott was his relentless police pursuer.

Then, in 1965, he portrayed a Scotland Yard inspector investigating the disappearance of a child, a child he begins to suspect does not exist, in Otto Preminger's bizarre thriller, *Bunny Lake Is Missing*. The same year he starred as the anguished Moor, *Othello*.

Unusual parts followed. In *Khartoum* (1966) he was the evil Mahdi, a fanatical desert leader: "I shall take Khartoum in blood, and the streets will run in blood, and the Nile will taste of blood for one hundred miles . . ." Then, in 1972, he triumphed in the screen adaptation of perhaps the best mystery play ever written, Anthony Shaffer's twisty *Sleuth*, playing thriller-writer Anthony Wyke engaging in cat-and-mouse. (Teased an ad: *If it was murder, where's the body? If it's only a game, why the blood?)*

William Goldman's *Marathon Man* (1976) provided Olivier with another great villain: Dr. Christian Szell, Nazi dentist and war criminal—"the White Angel of Auschwitz"—who tortures a young Columbia graduate student for the secret to a fortune. The same year he was a whitewashed Professor Moriarty dismayed by Sherlock Holmes' animosity in *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*.

In 1978 he portrayed a frail but determined hunter of German war criminals in Ira Levin's *The Boys from Brazil*, a fantastic plot to clone Hitler. He was a raffish, elderly pickpocket who befriends two youngsters in *A Little Romance* (1979), and in the lavish 1979 production of *Dracula* he was the relentless Professor Van Helsing, nemesis of the vampire.

At Lincoln Center, receiving the adulation of his peers, Olivier thanked for "kindness to one who is a foreigner, though not, perhaps, a stranger." Laurence Olivier throughout his screen career has been neither foreigner nor stranger to the mystery—for which we all give thanks.

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INTERVIEW: JOSEPH HANSEN (1)

This is the first part of an interview that will be concluded in the next issue.

EQMN: You've said that when you sat down to write the first Dave Brandstetter novel, *Fadeout*, in 1967 you wanted to right some wrongs about how homosexuals are treated in fiction.

HANSEN: I tried in *Fadeout* to stand on their heads a lot of received opinions about homosexuals. To Dave Brandstetter, I gave the kind of job mystery fiction usu-

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ally assigns to ultra-masculine types. Homosexuals are said not to be able to maintain stable relationships. Dave's with Rod Fleming had gone on for twenty-two years when *Fadeout* opened; it had ended only with Rod's death from cancer. This in contrast to Dave's father, who had nine marriages and eight divorces.

Homosexuals are said always to be seducing young boys. In *Fadeout,* as so often in real life, it is the teenage Anselmo who drags Dave to bed. And so on. Homosexuals know that most of what the straight world believes about them is nonsense. I wanted to tidy up the record a little in a novel people would feel compelled to read, a mystery novel.

EQMN: What about how homosexuals are treated by society?

HANSEN: Mostly, they're treated like a dirty joke people wish they'd never heard. By writing truthfully about homosexuals—good, bad, indifferent—I keep hoping to change that. And maybe I have—a little.

EQMN: To read your fiction is to learn a great deal about how to write it. But you also teach writing.

HANSEN: Yes, and teaching is exhilarating. I try to lay down for my students some basics—like never use two words where one will do; use the plainest words to get the plainest meaning; never explain, use what happens next to do the explaining; understate everything; stick as much as possible to verbs and nouns . . . But it's by working one on one with students, closely reading and editing everything they hand in, and writing critiques of every single paper that I think I sometimes am of real help. I'm proud of those students of mine who came to me never having published anything and ended up publishing their books. Writing can be taught—if the pupil is talented, intelligent, and determined.

EQMN: Do you have any capsule advice for beginning writers?

HANSEN: If you mean to be a writer, then decide what you want to write and write it. Talking about it, dreaming about it, will get you nowhere. It will probably take years for you to get the hang of it. It took me years. If you can find a working writer whose product you respect and who is willing and able to share some of his know-how with you, take his classes. But in the end it's up to you. I'd say that in today's tough publishing climate, you have to want to be a writer very, very much in order to succeed.

EQMN: What do you think of what is being published?

HANSEN: A great many books are being "created" by agents/merchandisers/film producers/publishers with nothing else in mind except to make money.

EQMN: Whose fault is it, do you think? Writers? Publishers? Editors? Readers?

HANSEN: In the old days, publishers worked on the basis that if a few books made a profit, then they could afford to publish the work of writers like, say, William Faulkner, whose novels sold pitifully for decades before the great public awoke to them. Today, if your book doesn't look like it will

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turn a profit, it's likely never to see print. This must discourage young serious writers and turn a certain number of them to trying to crank out the kind of garbage they see currently crowding the paperback racks.

But not all publishers—not even some that belong to conglomerates—have forsaken the old idealistic pattern. And a new element is entering the picture—the so-called small publisher, to whom some established writers are turning now in hopes of finding outlets for their work when it is of the sort that doesn't normally sell in the hundreds of thousands of copies.

EQMN: Most novelists have trouble with the little pieces of business needed for pace in scenes heavy with dialogue. One wonders what they would do without cigarettes. But when you have your characters smoke you do such as this, from *Backtrack:* "He twisted out his cigarette in a glass ashtray that had the name of the motel chain in its bottom."

HANSEN: I "see" scenes as I write them, and what people do is often interesting in contrast to what they're talking about. In my books they're often doing humdrum things, like fixing breakfast, say, while holding the most desperate conversations. As to that ashtray—I think if you're going to use a prop, you ought to show what it looks like. This adds conviction to a scene for the reader, takes him there.

EQMN: In *Backtrack* you set up a teenaged narrator as a super-intellect early on, thus making his depth of awareness and knowledge believable. How else do you get around the problems in writing first person, which many writers avoid? Do you prefer first to third person or just think it's more effective in some stories?

HANSEN: I prefer the third person, but now and then a story demands the voice of the central character to tell it as it should be told. *Huckleberry Finn* is such a book. So is *Catcher in the Rye. Backtrack* needed Alan's smartass-kid voice. I find that writing in the present tense helps make first-person narrative convincing—if one simply must use it.

EQMN: Like the majority of writers we've met, you are verbal and articulate. Do you think this comes from the same desire to communicate that writing does, or from the loneliness of writing?

HANSEN: The question is shrewd and answers itself. Yes, to both parts—speaking for myself.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

To some, best sellers are clearly the only books worth reading, preferably while they are still being talked about. To others, they are

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automatically beneath the notice of a discerning reader. Both views are of course equally ridiculous. Some wonderful books make the best-seller lists, and so do some astonishingly poor ones. The five novels reviewed below either have already achieved bestsellerdom at this writing or sport bylines that usually guarantee a spot on the lists. They show both the variation in quality among commercially successful novels and the sizable proportion of the most profitable books that belong to the crime-mystery genre.

*** Joseph Wambaugh: *The Delta Star,* Perigord/Morrow, $15.95. Combining gallows humor, creative obscenity, and an unconcealed sentimental streak, Wambaugh writes L.A. police novels with a distinctive voice. In his world, even the good cops are a little crazy. Though his earliest books were not really detective stories, this one is a standard procedural in its structure, with one main case and several minor ones to illustrate the stresses of the policeman's lot. The solution to the central mystery reveals both an inventive murder weapon and an ingenious motive. With just a little adjustment, including an earlier introduction of the killer, this could have been a genuine fair-play detective novel.

*** Dick Francis: *Banker,* Putnam, $14.95. If Francis' fans can be divided into two camps—those who read him because of the thoroughbred background and those who read him in spite of it—this one is decidedly for the former group. The emphasis is more on breeding than racing, as banker-hero Tim Ekaterin backs with his institution's funds a horseman who wants to enter the big time by purchasing Sandcastle, a can't-miss stud prospect. It soon becomes apparent there is at least one way (uncovered by a supposedly comprehensive insurance policy) that the ironically named stallion *can* miss. With a clever plot, much fascinating information about both banking and breeding, and some affecting characters, this is solid work from a reliable writer.

*** Stephen King: *Christine,* Viking, $16.95. The long tale of a malevolent late-Fifties Plymouth has some powerful and frightening scenes and strong characterizations, especially of the adolescent characters King does so well. It suffers only in comparison with his masterful novella collection, *Different Seasons,* and some of his earlier novels. King is incapable of being less than compulsively readable. (Note for fans: an associate better read than I in King's works claims that *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger,* published in 1982 by Donald M. Grant of West Kingston, Rhode Island, is a better book than any of his best sellers.)

** M. M. Kaye: *Death in Zanzibar,* St. Martin's, $12.95. Kaye owes her bestselling status not to her early mysteries in the Mignon G. Eberhart manner but to lengthy historical novels like *The Far Pavilions.* The present work, reissued to cash in on her new-found fame, is a revised version of the romantic whodunit first published in 1959 as *The House of Shade.* It's cer-

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tainly readable, albeit peopled with stereotypes and marked by reactionary political attitudes redolent of the Fifties.

** John Gardner: *Icebreaker*, Putnam, $10.95. If you're a confirmed James Bond nostalgic, desperately eager for new adventures of 007, Gardner's third effort in that line is better than nothing. Familiar elements include much cataloging of brand names and weapons specifications, a criminal mastermind's hidden headquarters, the obligatory torture sequence, and repeated identity reversals (fun for a while, finally tiresome). The solidly professional Gardner probably does this job as well as anyone could, but he (and others) produce much better thrillers when not saddled with the Bond formula.

Juvenile mysteries are nowadays allowed some elements that were strictly *verboten* when I was an avid reader of the Hardy Boys and Ellery Queen, Jr. The new admissibility of murder is implied in the title of Dana Brookins' *Who Killed Sack Annie?* (Clarion/Ticknor and Fields, $9.95), told by thirteen-year-old David Botts, whose jokey, self-deprecating style suggests he may grow up to resemble Michael Z. Lewin's Albert Samson or William L. DeAndrea's Matt Cobb.

Visiting his sister in Los Angeles, David joins forces with an unconventional eleven-year-old girl to investigate an attack they witnessed on a neighborhood bag lady. Though the writing and characters are good and the plot well constructed, I wonder how many of the novel's young readers will be as disappointed in the let-down solution as I was.

For slightly older kids is M. Arthur Bogen's *Double Dealing* (Avon, $2.25), first in a projected series about high-school sleuths Grant Decker and Sally Burchardt, a beautiful couple made for the fashion pages in contrast to Brookins' less conventionally attractive detecting team. No murder here, only drugs: someone has planted ten pounds of marijuana in narrator Grant's locker. But there *is* an element even more foreign to Nancy Drew and her contemporaries: sex! Also included is a figure I'd been led to believe had been vanquished from contemporary young adult fiction: an understanding (and useful) parent. The thin mystery plot is the weakest part of this well paced and readable novel.

One of those crime classics that should always be available is Joel Townsley Rogers' ingenious, suspenseful, and very, very strange 1945 novel *The Red Right Hand*, now reissued in a new paperback edition (Carroll and Graf, $3.50).

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"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

JOSEPH HANSEN

Bringing an author with the skill and reputation of Joseph Hansen to the pages of EQMM for the first time is no small delight for us—and what a story it is! Like all of Joseph Hansen's fine work, a growing and painful awareness of certain truths is central to the fast-moving plot; the prose is precise; and the emotion is powerful. There are touches in this story that might put you in mind of authors as diverse as Judith Guest and Cornell Woolrich. Just to give you an idea of what you have in store.

Joseph Hansen's new novel, Job's Year *(Holt, Rinehart & Winston), is due for publication this month, and earlier this year Countryman Press published* Backtrack, *a novel he touches upon in the interview earlier in this issue. You'll want to read them both . . .*

THE ANDERSON BOY

by JOSEPH HANSEN

Prothero, fastening the pegs of his car coat, pushed out through the heavy doors of the Liberal Arts Building, and saw the Anderson boy. The boy loped along in an Army surplus jacket and Army surplus combat boots, a satchel of books on his back. His hair, as white and shaggy as when he was five, blew in the cold wind.

He was a long way off. Crowds of students hurried along the paths under the naked trees between lawns brown and patched with last week's snow. But Prothero picked out the Anderson boy at once and with sickening certainty.

Prothero almost ran for his car. When he reached it, in the grey-cement vastness of Parking Building B, his hands shook so that he

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couldn't at first fit the key into the door. Seated inside, he shuddered. His sheepskin collar was icy with sweat crystals. He shut his eyes, gripped the wheel, leaned his head against it.

This was not possible. The trip to promote his book—those staring airport waiting rooms, this plane at midnight, that at four A.M., snatches of sleep in this and that hotel room, this bookseller luncheon, that radio call-in program, dawns for the *Today Show* and *Good Morning, America,* yawns for Johnny Carson. Los Angeles in ninety-degree heat, Denver in snow, Chicago in wind, New York in rain; pills to make him sleep, pills to wake him up; martinis, wine, and Scotch poured down him like water. Three weeks of it had been too much. His nerves were frayed. He was seeing things. The very worst things.

He drove off campus. By the shopping center, he halted for a red light. He thought about his lecture. It had gone well, which was surprising, tired as he was. But he'd been happy to be back where he belonged, earning an honest living, doing what he loved. Promotion tours? Never again. His publisher was pleased. The book was selling well. But Donald Prothero was a wreck.

The Anderson boy loped across in front of him. He shut his eyes, drew a deep breath, opened his eyes, and looked again. He was still sure. Yet how could it be? It was thirteen years since he'd last seen him, and more than a thousand miles from here. On that night, the boy had been a pale little figure in pajamas, standing wide-eyed in the dark breezeway outside the sliding glass wall of his bedroom, hugging a stuffed toy kangaroo. Prothero, in his panicked flight, naked, clutching his clothes, had almost run him over.

The boy had to have recognized him. Prothero was always around. He'd taught the boy to catch a ball, to name birds, lizards, cacti, to swim in the bright-blue pool just beyond that breezeway. Prothero had given him the toy kangaroo. He should have stopped. Instead, he'd kept running. He was only eighteen. Nothing bad had ever happened to him. Sick and sweating, he'd driven far into the desert. On some lost, moonlit road, half overgrown by chaparral, he'd jerked into his clothes, hating his body.

He'd known what he had to do—go to the sheriff. He'd started the car again, but he couldn't make himself do it. He couldn't accept what had happened. Things like that took place in cheap books and bad movies, or they happened to sleazy people on the TV news. Not to people like the Andersons. Not to people like him. It could wreck his whole life. He went home. To his room. As always. But he couldn't

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sleep. All he could do was vomit. His father, bathrobe, hair rumpled, peered at him in the dusky hall when Prothero came out of the bathroom for the third time.

"Have you been drinking?"

"You know better than that."

"Shall we call the doctor?"

"No, I'm all right now."

But he would never be all right again. Next morning, when he stripped to shower, he nearly fainted. His skin was caked with dried blood. He nearly scalded himself, washing it off. He trembled and felt weak, dressing, but he dressed neat and fresh as always. He kissed his mother and sat on his stool at the breakfast bar, smiling as always. He was a boy who smiled. He'd been senior class president in high school, captain of the basketball team, editor of the yearbook. These things had been handed him, and he'd accepted them without question. As he'd accepted scholarships to University for the coming fall. As he'd accepted his role as Jean Anderson's lover.

His mother set orange juice in front of him, and his mug with his initial on it, filled with creamy coffee. He knew what she would do next. He wanted to shout at her not to do it. He didn't shout. They would think he was crazy. She snapped on the little red-shelled TV set that hung where she could watch it as she cooked at the burner-deck, where his father and he could watch it while they ate. He wanted to get off the stool and go hide. But they would ask questions. He stayed.

And there on the screen, in black and white, was the Anderson house with its rock roof and handsome plantings, its glass slide doors, the pool with outdoor furniture beside it, the white rail fence. There in some ugly office sat the Anderson boy in his pajamas on a moulded plastic chair under a bulletin-board tacked with papers. The toy kangaroo lay on a floor of vinyl tile among cigarette butts. A pimply faced deputy bent over the boy, trying to get him to drink from a striped waxpaper cup. The boy didn't cry. He didn't even blink. He sat still and stared at nothing. There were dim, tilted pictures, for a few seconds, of a bedroom, dark blotches on crumpled sheets, dark blotches on pale carpeting. Bodies strapped down under the blankets were wheeled on gurneys to an ambulance whose rear doors gaped. The Sheriff's face filled the screen—thick, wrinkled eyelids, nose with big pores, cracked lips. He spoke. Then a cartoon tiger ate cereal from a spoon.

"People shouldn't isolate themselves miles from town." Prothero's

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father buttered toast. "Husband away traveling half the time. Wife and child alone. Asking for trouble."

"He came home." Prothero's mother set plates of scrambled eggs and bacon on the counter. "It didn't help."

"All sorts of maniacs running loose these days," Prothero's father said. "Evidently no motive. They'll probably never find who did it."

His father went to his office. His mother went to a meeting of the Episcopal Church altar guild. He drove to the Sheriff's station. He parked on a side street, but he couldn't get out of the car. He sat and stared at the flat-roofed, sand-colored building with the flagpole in front. He ran the radio. At noon, it said the Sheriff had ruled out the possibility of an intruder. The gun had belonged to Anderson. His were the only fingerprints on it. Plainly, there had been a quarrel and Anderson had shot first his wife and then himself. The Anderson boy appeared to be in a state of shock and had said nothing. A grandmother had flown in from San Diego to look after him. Prothero went home to the empty house and cried.

Now, at the intersection, he watched from his car as the boy pushed through glass doors into McDonald's. He had to be mistaken. This wasn't rational. Horns blared behind him. The light had turned green. He pressed the throttle. The engine coughed and died. Damn. He twisted the key, the engine started, the car bucked ahead half its length and quit again. The light turned orange. On the third try, he made it across the intersection, but the cars he'd kept from crossing honked angrily after him.

The Anderson boy? What made him think that? He'd known a runty little kid. This boy was over six feet tall. A towhead, yes, but how uncommon was that? He swung the car into the street that would take him home beneath an over-arch of bare tree limbs. The boy looked like his father—but that skull shape, those big long bones, were simply North European characteristics. Millions of people shared those. The odds were out of the question. It was his nerves. It couldn't be the Anderson boy.

He went from the garage straight to the den, shed the car coat, and poured himself a drink. He gulped down half of it and shivered. The den was cold and smelled shut up. He hadn't come into it yesterday when he got home from the airport. The curtains were drawn. He touched a switch that opened them. Outside, dead leaves stuck to flagging. Winter-brown lawn with neat plantings of birches sloped to a little stream. Woods were grey beyond the stream.

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"Ah," Barbara said, "it is you."

"Who else would it be?" He didn't turn to her.

"How did the lecture go?"

"Who built the footbridge?" he said.

"The nicest boy," she said. "A friend of yours from California. Wayne Anderson. Do you remember him?"

"I was going to build it," he said.

"I thought it would be a pleasant surprise for you when you got home. I was saving it." She stepped around stacks of books on the floor and touched him. "You all right?"

"It would have been good therapy for me. Outdoors. Physical labor. Sense of accomplishment."

"He said you'd been so nice to him when he was a little boy. When he saw the lumber piled up down there, and I told him what you had in mind, he said he'd like to do it. And he meant it. He was very quick and handy. Came faithfully every day for a whole week. He's an absolute darling."

Prothero finished his drink. "How much did you have to pay him?"

"He wouldn't let me pay him," she said. "So I fed him. That seemed acceptable. He eats with gusto."

Flakes of snow began to fall. Prothero said, "It's hard to believe."

"He saw you on television in San Diego, but it was tape, and when he phoned the station, you'd gone. He thought you'd come back here. He got on a plane that night." She laughed. "Isn't it wonderful how these children just leap a thousand miles on impulse? Could we even have imagined it at his age? He got our address from Administration and came here without even stopping to unpack. Not that he brought much luggage. A dufflebag is all."

"You didn't invite him to stay."

"I thought of it," she said.

He worked the switch to close the curtains. He didn't want to see the bridge. It was dim in the den and she switched on the desk lamp. He was pouring more whiskey into his glass. He said, "I didn't ask you about Cora last night. How's she doing?"

"It's a miracle. You'd never know she'd had a stroke." He knew from her voice that she was watching him and worried. His hands shook. He spilled whiskey. "You're not all right," she said. "I've never seen you so pale. Don, don't let them talk you into any more book peddling. Please?"

"Is he coming here again?"

"Yes. This afternoon." She frowned. "What's wrong? Don't you

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want to see him? He's very keen to see you. I'd say he worships you—exactly as if he were still five years old."

"They don't mature evenly," Prothero said.

"He hasn't forgotten a thing," she said.

In thickly falling snow, the Anderson boy jumped up and down on the little bridge and showed his teeth. He was still in the floppy Army surplus jacket. The clumsy Army surplus boots thudded on the planks. He took hold of the raw two-by-fours that were the railings of the bridge and tried to shake them with his big, clean hands. They didn't shake. Clumps of snow drifted under the bridge on the cold slow surface of the stream. Prothero stood on the bank, hands pushed into the pockets of the car coat. His ears were cold.

"It would hold a car." The Anderson boy came off the bridge. "If it was that wide. Not a nail in it. Only bolts and screws. No props in the stream-bed to wash out. Cantilevered."

Prothero nodded. "Good job," he said. "Your major will be engineering, then, right?"

"No." Half a head taller than Prothero, and very strong, the boy took Prothero's arm as if Prothero were old and frail, or as if he were a woman, and walked him back up the slope. "No, my grandfather's a contractor. I started working for him summers when I was fourteen. I got my growth early." He stopped on the flags and pawed at his hair to get the snow out of it. His hair was so white it looked as if he were shedding.

"So you learned carpentry by doing?" Prothero reached for the latch of the sliding door to the den.

But the Anderson boy's arm was longer. He rolled the door back and with a hand between Prothero's shoulderblades pushed the man inside ahead of him. "It's like breathing or walking to me." He shut the door and helped Prothero off with his coat. "And just about as interesting." He took the coat to the bathroom off the den. He knew right where it was. Prothero watched him shed his own jacket there and hang both coats over the bathtub to drip. He sat on the edge of the tub to take off his boots. "I wouldn't do it for a living."

"What about coffee?" Barbara came into the den. Prothero thought she looked younger. Maybe it was the new way she'd had her hair done. "It will be half an hour till dinner."

"I'll have coffee." The Anderson boy set his boots in the tub. He came out in a very white sweater and very white gym socks. His blue jeans were damp from the snow. He lifted bottles off the liquor

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cabinet and waved them at Barbara while he looked at Prothero with eyes clear as water, empty of intent as water. "Don will have a stiff drink."

"I'll have coffee," Prothero said, "thanks."

The Anderson boy raised his eyebrows, shrugged, and set the bottles down. Barbara went away. The Anderson boy dropped into Prothero's leather easy chair, stretched out his long legs, clasped his hands behind his head, and said, "No, my major will be psychology."

"That's a contrast," Prothero said. "Why?"

"I had a strange childhood," the Anderson boy said. "My parents were murdered when I was five. But you knew that, right?"

Prothero knelt to set a match to crumpled newspaper and kindling in the fireplace. "Yes," he said.

"I didn't. Not till I was sixteen. My grandparents always claimed they'd been killed in a highway accident. Finally they thought I was old enough to be told what really happened. They were murdered. Somebody broke in at night. Into their bedroom. I was there—in the house, I mean. I must have heard it. Shouts. Screams. Gunshots. Only I blacked it all out."

"They said you went into shock." The kindling flared up. Prothero reached for a log and dropped it. His fingers had no strength. The Anderson boy jumped out of the chair, picked up the log, laid it on the fire. Sparks went up the chimney. He rattled the firescreen into place and brushed his hands.

"I stayed in shock," he said. "I couldn't remember it even after they told me. They showed me old snapshots—the house, my parents, myself. It still didn't mean anything. It was as if it was somebody else, not me."

"You wouldn't even talk." Prothero wanted not to have said that. He went to the liquor cabinet and poured himself a stiff drink. "It was on television. On the radio."

"Oh," Barbara said, coming in with mugs of coffee.

"I told you, didn't I?" the Anderson boy asked her.

"He's going to be a psychologist," Prothero said.

"I should think so," Barbara said, and took one of the mugs back to the kitchen with her.

The Anderson boy clutched the other one in both hands and blew steam off it. He was in the easy chair again. "I didn't utter a sound for weeks. Then they took me to a swim school. I was afraid of the water. I screamed. They had to call a doctor with a needle to make me stop."

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Prothero blurted, "You could swim. I taught you."

The Anderson boy frowned. Cautiously he tried the coffee. He sucked in air with it, making a noise. He said, "Hey, that's true. Yeah, I remember now."

Prothero felt hollow. He drank. "Just like that?"

"Really. The pool—one of those little oval-shape ones. How the sun beat down out there—it made you squint." He closed his eyes. "I can see you. What were you then—seventeen? Bright-red swim trunks, no?"

Jean had given them to him. He'd been wearing floppy Hawaiian ones. The red ones were tight and skimpy. They'd made him shy but she teased him into wearing them. He felt her trembling hands on him now, peeling them off him in that glass-walled bedroom where the sun stung speckled through the loose weave of the curtains, and her son napped across the breezeway. Prothero finished his drink.

The Anderson boy said, "And there was a big striped beach ball. Yeah." He opened his eyes. "It's really fantastic, man. I mean, I can feel myself bobbing around in that water. I can taste the chlorine. And I won't go near a pool. They scare me to death."

"Every pool has chlorine and a beach ball." Prothero poured more whiskey on ice cubes that hadn't even begun to melt. "My trunks had to be some color."

"No, I swear, I remember. And that's why I came. When I saw you on TV, it began to happen. I began to remember—the house, the desert, my parents."

"The shouts?" Prothero asked numbly. "The screams? The gunshots?"

"Not that." The Anderson boy set down his mug. "I've read enough to know I'll probably never remember that." He pushed out of the chair and went to stand at the window. The light had gone murky. Only the snow fell white. "You can help me with the rest but you can't help me with that." He turned with a wan smile. "I mean, you weren't there. Were you?"

A shiny red moped stood under the thrust of roof above the front door. With the sunlight on the snow, it made the house look like a scene on Christmas morning. When the motor that let down the garage door stopped whining, Prothero heard the whine of a power saw from inside the house. The saw was missing from its hangers on the garage wall. He went indoors and smelled sawdust.

The Anderson boy was working in the den. He wasn't wearing a

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shirt. Barbara was watching him from the hall doorway. She smiled at Prothero. The noise of the saw was loud and she mouthed words to him and went off, probably to the kitchen. The Anderson boy switched off the saw, laid it on the carpet, rubbed a hand along the end of the eight-inch board he'd cut, and carried it to the paneled wall where pictures had hung this morning. He leaned it there with others of its kind and turned back and saw Prothero and smiled.

"Don't you ever have classes?" Prothero asked.

"I didn't get here in time to register," the Anderson boy said. "I'm auditing a little. I'll enroll for fall. He nudged one of the stacks of books on the floor. He was barefoot. "You need more shelves."

"I work in here, you know." The pictures were piled on the desk. He lifted one and laid it down. "I have lectures to prepare, papers to read, critiques to write."

"And books?" the Anderson boy said.

"No," Prothero said, "no more books."

"It was your book that led me to you," the Anderson boy said. "I owe a lot to that book."

Prothero looked at a photo of himself on a horse.

"I won't get in your way," the Anderson boy said. "I'll only be here when you're not." He looked over Prothero's shoulder. "Hey, you took me riding once, held me in front of you on the saddle. Remember?"

Barbara called something from the kitchen.

"That's lunch," the Anderson boy said, and flapped into his shirt. "Come on. Grilled ham-and-cheese on Swedish rye." He went down the hall on his big clean bare feet. He called back over his shoulder, "Guess whose favorite that is."

In the dark, Prothero said, "I'm sorry."

"You're still exhausted from that wretched tour." Barbara kissed him tenderly, stroked his face. "It's all right, darling. Don't brood. You need rest, that's all." She slipped out of bed and in the snow-lit room there was the ghostly flutter of a white nightgown. She came to him and laid folded pajamas in his hands. They were soft and smelled of some laundry product. "Sleep and don't worry. Worry's the worst thing for it."

He sat up and got into the pajamas. Buttoning them, he stared at the vague shape of the window. He was listening for the sound of the moped. It seemed always to be arriving or departing. The bed

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moved as Barbara slipped into it again. He lay down beside her softness and warmth and stared up into the darkness.

She said, "It's what all the magazine articles say."

"Who paid for the shelving?" he asked.

"You did," she said. "Naturally."

He said, "It's you I'm worried about."

"I'll be all right," she said. "I'll be fine."

The sound of the moped woke him. The red numerals of the clock read 5:18. It would be the man delivering the newspaper. He went back to sleep. But when he went out in his robe and pajamas to pick up the newspaper, he walked to the garage door. The moped had sheltered there, the new one, the Anderson boy's—the marks of the tire treads were crisp in the snow. There were the tracks of boots. He followed them along the side of the house. At the corner he stopped. He was terribly cold. The tracks went out to and came back from one of the clumps of birches on the lawn. Prothero went there, snow leaking into his slippers, numbing his feet. The snow was trampled under the birches. He stood on the trampled snow and looked at the house. Up there was the bedroom window.

In the new University Medical Center, he spent three hours naked in a paper garment that kept slipping off one shoulder and did nothing to keep from him the cold of the plastic chairs on which he spent so much of the time waiting. They were the same chairs in all the shiny rooms, bright-colored, ruthlessly cheerful, hard and sterile like the walls, counters, cabinets, tables.

Needles fed from the veins in his arms. He urinated into rows of bottles. A bald man sat in front of him on a stool and handled his genitals while he gazed out the wide and staring tenth-floor window at the city under snow. The paper of his garment whispered to and mated with the paper on the examination table while his rectum was probed with indifferent ferocity. The X-ray table was high and hard, a steel catafalque. He feared the blocky baby-blue machine above it would snap the thick armatures that held it and drop it on him. The nurse need not have asked him to lie rigid. When he breathed in at her request, the sterilized air hissed at his clenched teeth. They told him there was nothing wrong with him.

"Do you remember the rattlesnake?" the Anderson boy asked. He had cut channels in the uprights and fitted the shelves into them.

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The workmanship was neat. Horizontals and verticals were perfect. He was staining the shelves dark walnut to match the others already in the den. The stain had a peculiar smell. Prothero thought it was hateful. The big blond boy squatted to tilt up the can of stain and soak the rag he was using. "We were always out there taking hikes, weren't we? And one day there was this little fat snake."

"Sidewinder," Prothero said. "I thought you weren't going to be here when I was here."

"Sorry," the Anderson boy said. "I loused up the timing on this. Can't stop it in the middle. I'll be as fast about it as I can." He stood up and made the white of the raw fir plank vanish in darkness. "If you want to work, let me finish this half and I'll clear out."

"I was trying to teach you the names of the wildflowers. It would have been February. That's when they come out. Sidewinders don't grow big."

"It's a rattlesnake, though. Poisonous. I mean, you let me handle a non-poisonous snake once. I can still feel how dry it was. Yellow and brown."

"Boyle's king snake." Prothero took off his coat.

"You remember what you did?" the Anderson boy said.

"About the sidewinder?" Prothero poured a drink.

"Caught it. Pinned it down with a forked stick back of its head. It was mad. It thrashed around. I can shut my eyes and see that. Like a film."

"I didn't want it sliding around with you out there. You could stumble on it again. If I'd been alone or with grownups I'd have just waited for it to go away."

The Anderson boy knelt again to soak the rag. "You had me empty your knapsack. You got it behind the head with your fist and dropped it in the sack. We took it to the little desert museum in town."

"There was nothing else to do," Prothero said.

"You could have killed it," the Anderson boy said.

"I can't kill anything," Prothero said.

"That's no longer accepted," the Anderson boy said. "Anybody can kill. We know that now. It just depends on the circumstances."

Kessler was on the University faculty, but he had a private practice. His office, in a new one-story medical center built around an atrium, smelled of leather. It was paneled in dark woods. A Monet hung on one wall. Outside a window of diamond-shaped panes, pine branches held snow. From beyond a broad, glossy desk, Kessler

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studied Prothero with large, pained eyes in the face of a starved child.

"Has it ever happened to you before? I don't mean isolated instances—every man has those—I mean for prolonged periods, months, years."

"From the summer I turned eighteen until nearly the end of my senior year in college."

Kessler's eyebrows moved. "Those are normally the years of permanent erection. What happened?"

"I was having a crazy affair with, well, an older woman. In my home town. Older? What am I saying? She was probably about the age I am now."

"Married?" Kessler asked.

"Her husband traveled all the time."

"Except that once, when you thought he was traveling, he wasn't—right?"

"He caught us," Prothero said. "In bed together."

"Did you have a lot of girls before her?"

"None. Sexually, you mean? None."

There were *netsuke* on the desk, little ivory carvings of deer, monkeys, dwarfish humans. Prothero thought that if it were his desk he'd be fingering them while he listened, while he talked. Kessler sat still. He said:

"Then she did the seducing, right?"

"We were on a charity fund-raising committee." Prothero made a face. "I mean, I was a token member, the high-school's fair-haired boy. The rest were adults. She kept arranging for her and me to work together."

"And after her husband caught you, you were impotent?"

"For a long while I didn't know it. I didn't care. I didn't want to think about sex." He smiled thinly. "To put it in today's parlance—I was turned off."

"Did the man beat you? Did he beat her?"

Prothero asked, "Why has it started again?"

"It's never happened in your married life?"

Prothero shook his head.

"How did you come to marry your wife? Let me guess—she was the seducer, right?"

"That's quite a word," Prothero said.

"Never mind the word," Kessler said. "You know what I mean. The aggressor, sexually. She took the initiative, she made the ad-

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vances." His smile reminded Prothero of the high suicide rate among psychiatrists. Kessler said, "What do you want from me?"

"Yes," Prothero said. "She was the seducer."

"Has she lost interest in you sexually?"

"There's nothing to be interested in," Prothero said.

"Do you get letters from the woman?"

"What woman? Oh. No. No, she's—she's dead."

"On this book-promotion tour of yours," Kessler said, "did you see the man somewhere?"

Prothero said, "I wonder if I could have a drink."

"Certainly." Kessler opened a cabinet under the Monet. Bottles glinted. He poured fingers of whiskey into squat glasses and handed one to Prothero. "Been drinking more than usual over this?"

Prothero nodded and swallowed the whiskey. It was expensive and strong. He thought that in a minute it would make him stop trembling. "They had a child," he said, "a little boy. I liked him. We spent a lot of time together. Lately, he saw me on television. And now he's here."

Kessler didn't drink. He held his glass. "What's your sexual drive like?" he asked. "How often do you and your wife have sexual relations?"

"Four times a week, five." Prothero stood up, looking at the cabinet. "Did."

"Help yourself," Kessler said. "How old is he?"

The trembling hadn't stopped. The bottle neck rattled on the glass. "Eighteen, I suppose. With his father away most of the time, he took to me."

"Does he look like his father?"

"It's not just that." Prothero drank. "He keeps hanging around. He's always at the house." He told Kessler about the footbridge, about the bookshelves. "But there's more. Now he comes at night on that damn motor bike and stands in the dark, staring up at our bedroom. While we're asleep."

"Maybe he's homosexual," Kessler said.

"No." Prothero poured whiskey into his glass again.

"How can you be sure?" Kessler gently took the bottle from him, capped it, set it back in place, and closed the cabinet. "It fits a common pattern."

"He's too easy with women—Barbara, anyway, my wife." Prothero stared gloomily into his whiskey. "Like it was her he'd known forever. They've even developed private jokes."

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"Why not just tell him to go away?" Kessler asked.

"How can I?" Prothero swallowed the third drink. "What excuse can I give? I mean, he keeps doing me these kindnesses." Kessler didn't answer. He waited. Prothero felt his face grow hot. "Well, hell, I told him to keep out from under my feet. So what happens? He's there all the time I'm not. He's got changes of clothes in my closet. His shaving stuff is there. My bathroom stinks of his deodorant."

Kessler said, "Are they sleeping together?"

"Barbara and that child?"

"Why so appalled?" Kessler said mildly. "Weren't you a child when you slept with his mother?"

Prothero stood up.

"Don't go away mad," Kessler said. "You're going to get a bill for this visit, so you may as well listen to me. You're afraid of this boy. Now, why? Because he looks like his father—right? So what happened in that bedroom?"

"That was a long time ago." Prothero read his watch.

"Not so long ago it can't still make you impotent," Kessler said. "Thirty years old, perfect health, better than average sexual drive. It wasn't a beating, was it? It was something worse."

"It was embarrassing," Prothero said. "It was comic. Isn't that what those scenes always are? Funny?"

"You tell me," Kessler said.

Prothero set down the glass. "I have to go," he said.

When he stepped into the courtyard with its big Japanese pine, the Anderson boy was walking ahead of him out to the street. Prothero ran after him, caught his shoulder, turned him. "What are you doing here? Following me?"

The boy blinked, started to smile, then didn't. "I dropped a paper off on Dr. Lawrence. I've been sitting in on his lectures. He said he'd like to read what I've written about my case—the memory-loss."

Prothero drew breath. "Do you want a cup of coffee?"

"Why would you think I was following you?" The Anderson boy frowned at the hollow square of offices, the doors lettered with the names of specialists. "Are you feeling okay?"

"Nothing serious." Prothero smiled and clapped the boy's shoulder. "Come on. Coffee will warm us up."

"I have to get home. My grandparents will be phoning from California." He eyed the icy street. "I sure do miss that sunshine." His

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red moped was at the curb. He straddled it. Prothero couldn't seem to move. The boy called, "The shelves are finished. I'm going to lay down insulation in your attic next." He began to move off, rowing with his feet in clumsy boots. "You're losing expensive heat, wasting energy." The moped sputtered. If Prothero had been able to answer, he wouldn't have been heard. The Anderson boy lifted a goodbye hand, and the little machine wobbled off with him.

Prothero ran to his car and followed. The boy drove to the edge of town away from the campus and turned in at an old motel, blue paint flaking off white stucco. Prothero circled the block and drove into an abandoned filling station opposite. The boy was awkwardly pushing the moped into a unit of the motel. The door closed. On it was the number nine. Prothero checked his watch and waited. It grew cold in the car, but it was past noon. The boy liked his meals. He would come out in search of food. He did. He drove off on the moped.

The woman behind the motel office counter was heavy-breasted, middle-aged, wore rimless glasses, and reminded Prothero of his own mother. He showed the woman his University I.D. and said that an emergency had arisen: he needed to get from Wayne Anderson's room telephone numbers for his family on the West Coast. The woman got a key and moved to come with him. But a grey, rumpled-faced man in a grey, rumpled suit arrived, wanting a room, and she put into Prothero's hand the key to unit nine.

It needed new wallpaper, carpet, and curtains, but the boy kept it neat. Except for the desk. The desk was strewn with notebook pages, scrawled with loose handwriting in ballpoint pen, with typewritten pages, with Xerox copies of newspaper clippings.

Dry-mouthed, he went through the clippings. They all reported the shootings and the aftermath of the shootings. The Anderson boy's mother had lain naked in the bed. The man had lain clothed on the floor beside the bed, gun in his hand. Both shot dead. The child had wandered dazedly in and out of the desert house in sleepers, clutching a stuffed toy kangaroo and unable to speak. Prothero shivered and pushed the clippings into a manila envelope on which the boy had printed CLIPPINGS. He picked up the notebook pages and tried to read. It wasn't clear to him what the boy had tried to do here. Events were broken down under headings with numbers and letters. It looked intricate and mad.

Prothero tried the typewritten pages. Neater, easier to read, they

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still seemed to go over and over the same obsessive points. No page was complete. These must be drafts of the pages the boy had taken to Dr. Lawrence. A red-plastic wastebasket overflowed with crumpled pages. He took some of these out, flattened them, tried to read them, looking again and again at his watch. For an instant, the room darkened. He looked in alarm at the window. The woman from the motel office passed. Not the boy. Prothero would hear the moped. Anyway, he had plenty of time. But the crumpled pages told him nothing. He pushed them back into the wastebasket. Then he noticed the page sticking out of the typewriter. It read:

Don Prothero seems to have been a good friend to me, even though he was much older. My interviews with him have revealed that we spent much time together. He taught me to swim, though I afterward forgot how. He took me on nature walks in the desert, which I also had forgotten until meeting him again. He bought me gifts. The shock of my parents' death made me forget what I witnessed that night—if I witnessed anything. But why didn't Don come to see me or try to help me when he learned what had happened? He admits he didn't. And this isn't consistent with his previous behavior. My grandmother says he didn't attend the funeral. A friendship between a small boy and a teenage boy is uncommon. Perhaps there never was such a friendship. Maybe it wasn't me Don came to see at all. Maybe he came—

Prothero turned the typewriter platen, but the rest of the page was blank. He laid the key with a clatter on the motel-office counter, muttered thanks to the woman, and fled. His hands shook and were slippery with sweat as he drove. He had a lecture at two. How he would manage to deliver it, he didn't know, but he drove to the campus. Habit got him there. Habit would get him through the lecture.

Barbara's car was in the garage. He parked beside it, closed the garage, went into the den, poured a drink, and called her name. He wondered at the stillness of the house. Snow began to fall outside. "Barbara?" He searched for her downstairs. Nowhere. She was never away at this hour. She would have left a note. In the kitchen. Why, when she was gone, did the kitchen always seem the emptiest of rooms? He peered at the cross-stitched flowers of the bulletin board by the kitchen door. There was no note. He frowned. He used the yellow kitchen wall-phone. Cora answered, sounding perky.

He said, "Are you all right? Is Barbara there?"

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"I'm fine. No—did she say she was coming here?"

"I thought there might have been an emergency."

"No emergency, Don. Every day, in every way, I'm—"

"I wonder where the hell she is," he said and hung up. Of course she wouldn't have been at her mother's. Her car was still here, and Cora wouldn't have picked her up—Cora no longer drove.

Had Barbara been taken ill herself? He ran up the stairs. She wasn't in the bathroom. She wasn't in the bedroom. What was in the bedroom was a toy kangaroo. The bedclothes were neatly folded back and the toy kangaroo sat propped against a pillow, looking at him with empty glass eyes. Its grey cloth was soiled and faded, its stitching had come loose, one of the eyes hung by a thread. But it was the same one. He would know it anywhere. As he had known the boy.

He set the drink on the dresser and rolled open the closet. It echoed hollowly. Her clothes were gone. A set of matched luggage she had bought for their trip to Europe two years ago had stood on the shelf above. It didn't stand there now. Involuntarily, he sat on the bed. "But it wasn't my fault," he said. He fumbled with the bedside phone, whimpering, "It wasn't my fault, it wasn't my fault." From directory assistance he got the number of the motel. He had to dial twice before he got it right.

The motherly woman said, "He checked out. When I told him you'd been here, going through his papers, he packed up, paid his bill, asked where the nearest place was he could rent a car, and cleared right off."

"Car?" Prothero felt stupid. "What about his moped?"

"He asked me to hold it. He'll arrange for a college friend to sell it for him—some boy. Goldberg?"

"Where's the nearest place to rent a car?"

"Econo. On Locust Street. It's only two blocks."

The directory-assistance operator didn't answer this time. Prothero ran down to the den. He used the phonebook. The snow fell thicker outside the glass doors. He longed for it to cover the footbridge. Econo Car Rentals was slow in answering, too. And when at last a dim female voice came on, he could not get it to tell him what he wanted to know.

"This is the college calling, don't you understand? He wasn't supposed to leave. His family are going to be very upset. There's been

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a little confusion, that's all. He can't be allowed to go off this way. Now, please—"

A man spoke. "What's this about Wayne Anderson?"

"He's just a student," Prothero said. "Do you realize he'll take that car clear out to California?"

"That information goes on the form. Routinely," the man said. "Are you a relative of this Wayne Anderson?"

"Ah," Prothero said, "you did rent him a car, then?"

"I never said that. I can't give out that kind of information. On the phone? What kind of company policy would that be?"

"If this turns out to be a kidnaping," Prothero said recklessly, "your company policy is going to get you into a lot of trouble. Now—what kind of car was it? What's the license number?"

"If it's a kidnaping," the man said, "the people to call are the police." His mouth left the phone. In an echoing room, he said to somebody, "It's some stupid college-kid joker. Hang it up." And the phone hummed in Prothero's hand.

He was backing the car down the driveway when Helen Moore's new blue Subaru hatchback pulled into the driveway next door. He stopped and honked. She stopped, too. The door of her garage opened. She didn't drive in. She got out of the car, wearing boots and a Russian fur hat. Before she closed the door behind her, Prothero glimpsed supermarket sacks on the seat. With a gloved hand, she held the dark fur collar of her coat closed at the throat. The door of her garage closed again. She came toward the snow-covered hedge. Snowflakes were on her lashes. "Something wrong?"

"I'm missing one wife. Any suggestions?"

"Are you serious?" She tilted her head, worry lines between her brows. "You are. Don, dear—she left for the airport." Helen struggled to read her wristwatch, muffled in a fur coat cuff, the fur lining of a glove. "Oh, when? An hour ago? You mean you didn't know? What have we here? Scandal in academe?"

Prothero felt his face redden. "No, no, of course not. I forgot, that's all. Wayne Anderson came for her, right?"

"Yes. Brought her luggage out, put it in the trunk. Nice boy, that."

Prothero felt sick. "Did you talk with Barbara?"

"She looked preoccupied. She was already in the car." She winced upward. "Can they really fly in this weather?"

"There'll be a delay," Prothero said. "So maybe I can catch them.

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She's taking this trip for me. There are things I forgot to tell her. Did you notice the car?"

"Japanese. Like mine. Darling, I'm freezing." She hurried back to the Subaru and opened the door. "Only not blue, of course—I've got an exclusive on blue." Her voice came back to him, cheerful as a child's at play in the falling snow. "White. White as a bridal gown." She got into the car and slammed the door. Her garage yawned again, and she drove inside.

Defroster and windshield wipers were no match for the snow. The snowplows hadn't got out here yet. He hadn't put on chains, and the car kept slurring. So did others. Not many. Few drivers had been foolhardy enough to venture out of town. Those who had must have had life or death reasons. But life and death were no match for the snow, either. Their cars rested at angles in ditches, nosed in, backed in. The snow was so dense in its falling that it made blurs of the drivers' bundled shapes. They moved about their stranded machines like discoverers from some future ice age come upon the wreckage of our own.

A giant eighteen-wheeler loomed through the whiteness. Prothero was on the wrong side of the road. He hadn't realized this. The truck came directly at him. He twisted the wheel, slammed down on the brake pedal. The car spun out of control—but also out of the path of the truck. He ended up, joltingly, against the trunk of a winter-stripped tree. He tried for a while to make the car back up, but the wheels only spun.

He turned off the engine and leaned on the horn. Its sound was frail in the falling snow. He doubted anyone would hear it up on the empty road. And if the crews didn't find him before dark they would stop searching. By morning, when they came out again, he might be frozen to death. There was a heater in the car, but it wouldn't run forever. He left the car, waded up to the road. He saw nothing—not the road itself, now, let alone a car, a human being. He shouted, but the thickly falling snow seemed to swallow up the sound. It was too far to try to walk back to town. Too cold. No visibility. He returned to the car. If he froze to death, did he care?

They found him before dark and delivered him, though not his car, back home. For a long time he sat dumbly in the den, staring at his reflection in the glass doors. Night fell. The doors became black mirrors. He switched on the desk lamp, reached for the tele-

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phone, drew his hand back. He couldn't call the police. Not now, any more than on that desert night twelve years ago. He got up and poured himself a drink. And remembered Goldberg. He got Goldberg's telephone number from Admissions, rang it, left a message. He sat drinking, waiting for Goldberg to call. *Barbara,* he kept thinking, *Barbara.*

He heard the Anderson boy's moped. He had been asleep and the sound confused him. He got up stiffly and stumbled to the front door. The snow had stopped falling. The crystalline look of the night made him think it must be late. He read his watch. Eleven. He'd slept, all right. Even the snowplow passing hadn't wakened him. The street, in its spaced circles of lamplight, was cleared. He switched on the front door lamp. Goldberg came wading up the walk in a bulky windbreaker with a fake-fur hood, his round, steel-rimmed glasses frosted over. He took them off when he stepped into the house. He had a round, innocent, freckled face. Prothero shut the door.

"Why didn't you phone?" he said.

The boy cast him a wretched purblind look and shook his head. "I couldn't tell you like that."

"Where is Anderson? Where did he tell you to send the money when you sold his moped?"

"Home. San Diego," Goldberg said. "Is that whiskey? Could I have some, please? I'm frozen stiff."

"Here." Prothero thrust out the glass. Goldberg pulled off a tattered driving glove and took the glass. His teeth chattered on the rim. Prothero said, "What was his reason for leaving? Did he tell you?"

Miserably, Goldberg nodded. He gulped the whiskey, shut his eyes, shuddered. "Oh, God," he said softly, and rubbed the fragile-looking spectacles awkwardly on a jacket sleeve, and hooked them in place. He looked at the door, the floor, the staircase—everywhere but at Prothero. Then he gulped the rest of the whiskey and blurted, "He ran off with your wife. Didn't he? I laughed when he said it, but it's true, isn't it? That's why you phoned me."

Prothero said, "My wife is in Mankato. Celebrating the birthday of an ancient aunt. I called you because I'm worried about Anderson."

"Oh, wow. What a relief." Goldberg's face cleared of its worry and guilt. "I knew he was a flake. I mean—I'm sorry, sir, but I mean, a little weird, right? I was a wimp to believe him. Forgive me?"

"Anything's possible," Prothero said.

"He really sold me." Goldberg set the empty whiskey glass on one

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of a pair of little gilt Venetian chairs beside the door. "See, I said if he did it I'd have to tell you. And he said I didn't need to bother—you'd already know." Goldberg pushed the freckled fat hand into its glove again. His child's face pursed in puzzlement. "That was kinky enough, but then he said something really spacey, okay? He said you wouldn't do anything about it. You wouldn't dare. What did he mean by that?"

"Some complicated private fantasy. Don't worry about it." Prothero opened the door, laid a hand on the boy's shoulder. "As you say, he's a little weird. Disturbed. And my wife's been kind to him."

"Right. He had a traumatic childhood. His parents were murdered. He told you, right?" Goldberg stepped out onto the snowy doorstep. "He said he liked coming here." Halfway down the path, Goldberg turned back. "You know, I read your book. It helped me. I mean, this is a killer world. Sometimes you don't think there's any future for it. Your book made me feel better." And he trudged bulkily away through the snow toward the moped that twinkled dimly in the lamplight at the curb.

Prothero shut the door and the telephone rang. He ran for the den, snatched up the receiver, shouted hello. For a moment, the sounds from the other end of the wire made no sense. Had some drunk at a party dialed a wrong number? No. He recognized Barbara's voice.

"Don't come!" she shouted. "Don't come, Don!"

And the Anderson boy's voice. "Apple Creek," he said. "You know where that is? The Restwell Motel." Prothero knew where Apple Creek was. West and south, maybe a hundred miles—surely no more. Why had he stopped there? The snow? But the roads would have been cleared by now. "We'll expect you in two hours."

"Let her go, Wayne. She had nothing to do with it."

"She has now. Don't worry. She's all right."

She didn't sound all right. In the background, she was screaming. Most of her words got lost. But some Prothero was able to make out. "He's got a gun! Don't come, Don! He'll kill you if you come!"

"I'll be there, Wayne," Prothero said. "We'll talk. You've got it wrong. I'll explain everything. Don't hurt Barbara. She was always good to you."

"Not the way my mother was good to you."

Prothero felt cold. "You keep your hands off her."

"We're going to bed now, Don," the Anderson boy said. "But it's

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all right. You just knock when you get here. Room eighteen. We won't be sleeping."

"Don't do this!" Prothero shouted. "It was an accident, Wayne—I didn't kill them! I was only a kid!"

But the Anderson boy had hung up.

The keys to Barbara's car ordinarily hung from a cup hook on the underside of a kitchen cupboard, but they weren't there now. He ran upstairs. He was the professor, but she was the absent-minded one in the family. She sometimes locked the keys inside her car—so she kept an extra set of keys. He fumbled through drawers with shaking hands, tossing flimsy garments out onto the floor in his panic.

He found the keys, started out of the bedroom, and saw the tattered toy kangaroo staring at him from the bed with its lopsided glass eyes that had seen everything. He snatched it up and flung it into a corner. He ran to it and drew back his foot to kick it. Instead, he dropped to his knees, picked it up, and hugged it hard against his chest and began to cry, inconsolably. *Dear God, dear God!*

Blind with tears, he stumbled from the room, down the stairs, blundered into his warm coat, burst into the garage. When he backed down the drive, the car hard to control in the snow, twice wheeling stupidly backward into the hedge, the kangaroo lay face down on the seat beside him.

He passed the town square where the old courthouse loomed up dark beyond its tall, reaching, leafless trees, the cannon on the snow-covered lawn hunching like some shadow beast in a child's nightmare. No—the building wasn't entirely dark. Lights shone beyond windows at a corner where narrow stone steps went up to glass-paned doors gold-lettered POLICE. He halted the car at the night-empty intersection and stared long at those doors—as he had sat in his car, staring at the sunny desert police station on that long-ago morning. *I was only a kid!* He gave a shudder, wiped his nose on his sleeve, and drove on.

The little towns were out there in the frozen night that curved over the snowy miles and miles of sleeping prairie, curved like a black ice dome in which the stars were frozen. Only the neon embroidery on their margins showed that the towns were there. At their hearts they were darkly asleep, except for here and there a streetlight, now and then a traffic signal winking orange. He had never felt so lonely in his life. He drove fast. The reflector signs

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bearing the names of the little lost towns went past in flickers too brief to read.

But there was no mistaking Apple Creek, no mistaking that this was the place he had headed for in the icy night, the end of his errand, the end of Don Prothero, the end so long postponed. The Restwell Motel stretched along the side of the highway behind a neat white rail fence and snow-covered shrubs, the eaves of its snow-heaped roof outlined in red neon tubing.

And on its blacktop drive, not parked neatly on the bias in the painted slots provided by the management but jammed in at random angles, stood cars with official seals on their doors and amber lights that winked and swiveled on their rooftops. Uniformed men in bulky leather coats, crash helmets, stetsons, and boots stood around, guns on their thighs in holsters, rifles in their gloved hands.

Prothero left his car and ran toward the men. The one he chose to speak to had a paunch. His face was red under a ten-gallon hat. He was holding brown sheepskin gauntlets over his ears. He lowered them when he saw Prothero, but his expression was not welcoming.

Prothero asked, "What's happening here?"

"You want a room? Ask in the office." The officer pointed at a faroff door, red neon spelling out OFFICE. But at that instant a clutch of officers on the far side of the bunched cars moved apart and Prothero saw another door, the door they all seemed interested in. Without needing to, he read the numbers on the door. 18.

"My wife's in there!" he said.

The heavy man had turned away, hands to his cold ears again. But the brown wool hadn't deafened him. He turned back, saying, "What!" It was not a question.

"Barbara Prothero." He dug out his wallet to show identification cards. "I'm Donald Prothero."

"Hasenbein!" It was a name. The bulky man shouted it. "Hasenbein!" And Hasenbein separated himself from the other officers. He was at least twenty years younger than the bulky man. "This here's Lieutenant Hasenbein. You better tell him. He's in charge."

Hasenbein, blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked, looked too young to be in charge of anything. Prothero told him what seemed safe to tell. "He became a friend. He's disturbed."

"You better believe it," Hasenbein said. He dug from a jacket pocket a small black-and-white tube, uncapped it, rubbed it on his mouth like lipstick. "See that broken window?" He capped the tube and pushed it back into the pocket. "He fired a gun through that

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window." Hasenbein studied him. "Why did he stop here? Why did he telephone you? What does he want? Money?"

"There's something wrong with his mind," Prothero said. "He's got it into his head that I harmed him. He's trying to avenge himself. He phoned to tell me to come here. No, he doesn't want money. I don't know what he wants. To kill me, I guess. What brought you here?"

"The manager. He came out to turn off the signs. The switch box is down at this end. And he heard this woman screaming in unit eighteen—your wife, right? He banged on the window and told them to quiet down or he'd call the Sheriff. And the kid shot at him. Luckily, he missed."

Prothero's knees gave. Hasenbein steadied him. "Is my wife all right?"

"There was only the one shot."

"There are so many of you," Prothero said. "Can't you go in there and get her out?" He waved his arms. "What's the good of standing around like this?"

"It's a question of nobody getting hurt needlessly."

"Needlessly! He could be doing anything in there—he could be doing anything to her!" Hasenbein didn't respond. He was too young. He was in way over his head.

Prothero ran forward between the cars. "Barbara!" he shouted. "Barbara? It's Don. I'm here! Wayne? Wayne!" Two officers jumped him, held his arms. He struggled, shouting at the broken window, "Let her go, now! I'll come in and we'll talk—I said I'd come, and I came!"

No light showed beyond the broken window, but in the eerie, darting beams of the amber lights atop the patrol cars Prothero saw for a moment what he took to be a face peering out. The Anderson boy said, "Tell them to let you go." Prothero looked at the officers holding him. They didn't loosen their grip on his arms. Hasenbein appeared. He twiched the corners of his boyish mouth in what was meant for a reassuring smile and turned away.

"Anderson?" he shouted, "we can't do that! We can't let him come in there—we can't take a chance on what will happen to him! Why don't you calm down now, and just toss that gun out here and come out the door nice and quiet with your hands in the air? We're not going to hurt you—that's a promise! It's a cold night, Anderson, let's get this over with!"

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"Where's Barbara?" Prothero shouted. "What have you done with her? If you've hurt her, I'll kill you!"

"Sure!" the Anderson boy shouted. Now his face was plain to see at the window. Prothero wondered why nobody shot him. "You killed my father and my mother, why not me? Why not finish off the whole family? Why didn't you kill *me* that night? Then there wouldn't have been any witnesses!"

"I didn't kill them!" Prothero gave his body a sudden twist. It surprised the men holding him. It surprised him too. He fell forward. The cold blacktop stung his hands. He scrambled to his feet and lunged at the broken window. He put his hands on the window frame and leaned into the dark room.

"Your father came in from the breezeway—he was supposed to be out of town." Prothero heard his own voice as if it were someone else's voice. He had cut his hands on the splinters of glass in the window frame and could feel the warm blood. "He had a gun, and he stood there in the doorway and shot at us." Prothero wondered why the boy didn't shoot him now. He wondered what had happened to the officers. But the words kept coming.

"It was dark, but he knew where to shoot. I heard the bullet hit her. I've heard it in my nightmares for years. I rolled off the bed. He came at me, and I kicked him. He bent over and I tried to get past him, but he grabbed me. I fought to get away and the gun went off. You hear me, Wayne? He had the gun—not me. He shot himself! His blood got all over me, but I didn't kill him, I didn't kill him, I—"

"All right, sir." Hasenbein spoke almost tenderly. He took Prothero gently and turned him. He frowned at Prothero's hands and swung toward the officers standing by the cars, the vapor of their breath gold in the flickering lights. "We need a first-aid kit here." Hasenbein bent slightly toward the window. "Okay, Thomas—you can bring him out now."

"My wife," Prothero said. "Where's my wife?"

"Down at the substation where it's warm," Hasenbein said. "She's all right."

A frail-looking officer with a mustache brought a white metal box with a red cross pasted to it. He knelt on the drive and opened the box.

Carefully, he took Prothero's bleeding hands. Prothero scarcely noticed. He stared at the door of unit eighteen. It opened and a police officer stepped out, followed by the Anderson boy in his shapeless

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Army fatigues and combat boots. He was handcuffed. Under his arm, a worn manila envelope trailed untidy strips of Xeroxed newspaper clippings. He looked peacefully at Prothero.

"What did you do to Barbara?" Prothero said.

"Nothing. You put her through this—not me. You could have told me any time." With his big, clean, carpenter's hands made awkward by the manacles, he gestured at the officers and cars. "Look at all the trouble you caused."

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Executing a short story of substance and wit in only a few hundred words is a very special skill, comparable to the rendering of a lyric, a sonatina, or a minute carving. This is Mr. Shires' third such offering in less than a year. We think you'll love it and love him for it. We do . . .

DEATH OF A KNOCKER?

by GEOFFREY SHIRES

My wife and I constantly set our faces against those chaps who come knocking at the doors in our neighborhood claiming to be dealers in antiques.

Their tastefully printed cards invite us to disgorge our hypothetical store of period furniture, old glass and china, jewelry, coins, etc. Generous terms are offered, but the address is invariably in another town, plainly to discourage post-mortems.

The doorstep interview is a pedestrian contest, won by the side that gets its foot in first. Literally. If we lose, the knocker invades the house and has a full inventory of our belongings before we can say Queen Anne.

Not that we have much. A period piece or two in daily use, and the odd heirloom that money won't buy. The most attractive item is a glass-fronted cupboard in African mahogany, hardly Regency, probably early to mid-Victorian. When we refurnished on moving house, it had no place in the home and I appropriated it for my laboratory.

I teach chemistry at the school, and I find it useful to have my own small lab where I can rehearse setting up demonstrations for my classes. The garden shed—my "laboratory" to outsiders—contains an assortment of apparatus and reagents stored in the mahogany cupboard. I call the cupboard Lavoisier to console it for the indignity.

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Lavoisier has been much admired, particularly by one knocker who followed me down the garden and offered a tidy sum. I explained there was no sale and he went away.

I keep the cupboard locked because my wife is critical of my using kitchen discards for my nasty chemicals. "You really shouldn't keep sulphur in a canister labeled flour," she told me.

"Or magnesium sulphate—Epsom salts to you—in an ex-sugar bag," I said. "But we're not Quakers, you know."

She furrowed. "Quakers?"

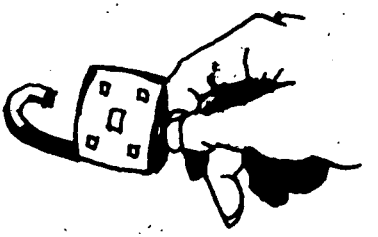
"Yes. Strict practicing Quakers would never put even tea in a coffee tin. It would be telling a lie!"

She sniffed. "So long as you keep it locked, then."

One evening when I arrived home, my wife was out and I repaired to the lab to set up the next day's delights. The door of the shed was ajar, the lock forced, and, inside, Lavoisier was missing. The invader had evidently carried him away bodily, chemicals and all.

When I told my wife, she was philosophical. "You can have that old kitchen cabinet in the cellar. Call it Mrs. Beeton if you like." She laughed. "I hope the thief's wife doesn't help herself to tea and sugar. She might get a chemical shock."

I pondered. "Perhaps he'll have a celebratory drink. A stiff sulphuric acid from the gin bottle. Topped up with tonic-disguised cyanide solution."



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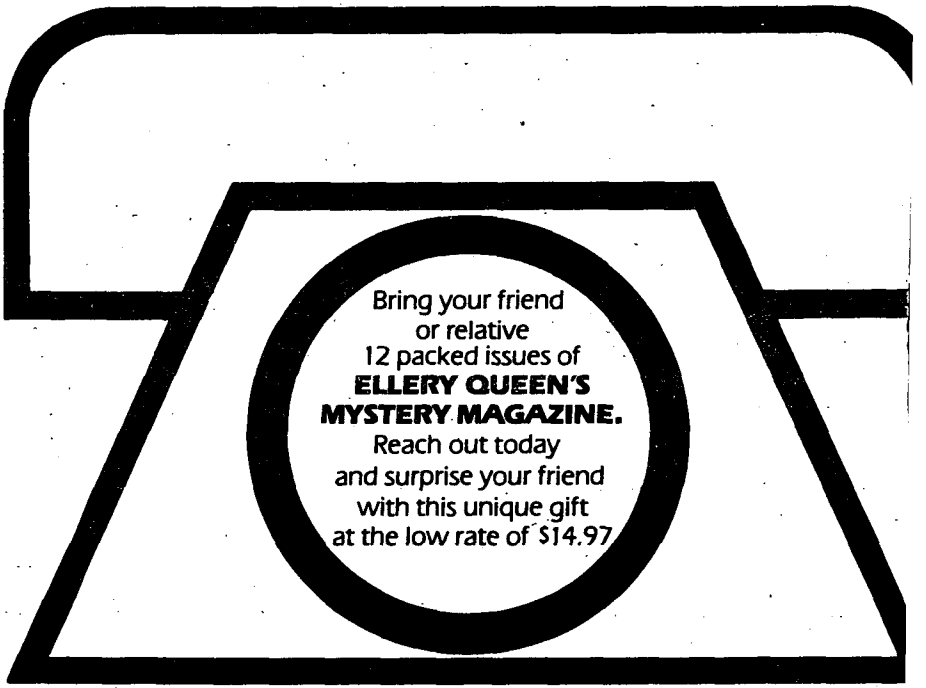

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a *NEW* short story by

IAN STUART

Pierre had come to Les Eyzies from Marseilles by way of Lyons, Bordeaux, and several other, smaller places where he had stayed so briefly he could no longer remember their names. There was a good reason for his moving around. He had left Marseilles in a hurry, two steps ahead of the police and only one ahead of Georges Ramidou. Of the two, he feared Ramidou by far the more . . .

THE GROTTE DE ST. SIMON

by IAN STUART

The road from Les Eyzies winds below rock cliffs two or three hundred feet high. In places the cliffs are honeycombed with caves where men lived thousands of years ago when the level of the River Vézère was much higher than it is today. In others, salts dripping from the roof or building up from the floor have, in the course of countless centuries, formed myriad stalactites and stalagmites. Honey and crystal colored, they are shaped like columns, crosses, or fantastic coral reefs. Even human figures. It takes two centuries for the deposits to bridge a gap a couple of inches across. Stalagmites have just about the slowest growth rate known to man.

The Grotte de St. Simon might not have been one of the biggest or most famous caves but thousands of visitors flocked to it every summer, climbing up the long path from the road to pay their five francs at the cash box by the entrance. From May to October two guides were kept busy most of the day, shepherding groups of French, American, British, and half a dozen other nationalities along the passages and pointing out the most striking formations. A few feet away through the rock a team of archaeologists and

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workmen was excavating another gallery. Sometimes you could hear their drills and shovels and feel the ground tremble under your feet.

That July afternoon Pierre Dumont was showing a party round. "On your left is the greatest wonder of the caves," he declared for the fifth time that day, "the crystallization known as St. Simon. As you can see, it bears a striking resemblance to a man and measures 1.8 metres."

The group stared obediently into the dimly lit recess at the end of the gallery. There were notices forbidding people to touch the formations and ropes to keep them at a safe distance, but they could see that the column did indeed look uncannily like a man. In French, English, and German they murmured their wonder.

"How long do you figure it took to make that?" a fat woman from Denver, Colorado, breathed to her husband.

Dumont heard her. "Two million years, Madame," he informed her with rather a flourish. He had no idea how near the truth it was, nor did he care, the number had been the first to come into his head. It often did now, like a sort of password. In a sense it was—a password to a new life, a life of comfort with money to spend on luxuries.

"Gee," the woman exclaimed. "I must bring Carol-Ann to see this."

Her husband grunted. He was a real-estate man and he didn't care for grubbing around in underground passages looking at what this Frenchman called crystallizations. He didn't care much for the Frenchman either—he looked a smooth s.o.b. He was looking forward to getting back to the hotel and a good stiff bourbon.

Pierre led the party through a low rock arch to another passage. Fools, he thought contemptuously, following him like sheep and hanging on his every word. They'd believe anything he liked to tell them. He had been a guide for only three weeks but already the work bored him.

He had come to Les Eyzies from Marseilles by way of Lyons, Bordeaux, and several other, smaller places where he had stayed so briefly he could no longer remember their names. There was a good reason for his moving around. He had left Marseilles in a hurry, two steps ahead of the police and only one ahead of Georges Ramidou.

Of the two, Pierre feared Ramidou by far the more.

Marseilles has earned its reputation as the most violent, crime-ridden city in France the hard way—and Georges Ramidou was one of its most notorious citizens. You started asking questions there about the drugs business, vice, protection rackets, or any other form of criminal activity and sooner or later his name would crop up.

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Usually sooner. Keep on asking questions and you were likely to end up another statistic in the murder records. Ramidou boasted there was nothing he could learn from the most celebrated gangsters in New York and Chicago—and there were few people who regarded it as an idle boast.

Pierre had worked for him for almost a year. Until four months ago. Then he had defected, not only with two million francs Ramidou considered his—after all, he had master-minded its removal from others who regarded it as theirs—but with Georges' girl as well, a striking redhead with a voluptuous figure named Danielle.

Danielle was practical as well as ravishing. Georges had given her a lot, but he was forty-five and putting on weight. Pierre was twenty years younger and a much more satisfying lover. Also, Danielle was confident she could trick him into telling her where he had hidden the two million francs—she had no intention of remaining his girl forever.

Apart from planning and the overall supervision, Ramidou no longer played an active role in the day-to-day running of his various enterprises. He left that to his staff. But Pierre's defection was a different matter. Not only had he lost a great deal of money, but worse, much worse, his pride had been hurt. He imagined the underworld laughing at him behind his back. Even the dirty *flics*. That sort of thing was bad for business. Pierre he would handle himself.

The group followed Dumont back to the entrance, stopping on the way to gaze at the cave's other attractions. By the cash box the foreigners felt in their pockets, wondering how much they should tip him. He accepted their offerings graciously, not really caring. He was rich—had he not still got most of the two million safely hidden away where nobody could find it?

Secretly relieved to be back in the open air, the members of the party started off back down the path toward the road and their cars. On the wooden platform outside the entrance, three people were already waiting for the next tour to start while others were struggling up the slope, fat elderly women in unbecoming dresses carrying macks, skinny younger ones in unsuitable shoes, and men sweating in jackets. It had rained earlier and the air was still hot and clammy. Repelled by the sight of them, Pierre turned and looked out over the wooden barrier bounding the platform.

Across the road a hundred feet below, a big black car had turned into the car park. A Mercedes. Dumont felt a sudden shock of fear:

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Ramidou owned a car like that. The driver reversed into a gap between two other cars and three men got out.

Pierre hardly noticed the two on the left and right—he had eyes only for the man in the middle. He was middle-aged and no more than five feet five, his belly thrusting against his expensive, tight-buttoned suit. There could be no mistaking Georges Ramidou. Not when you lived with him haunting your dreams as Dumont had done for the last four months.

He stood rooted to the spot, staring at Ramidou like a terrified animal fascinated by the predator it knows will kill it. Fear crept up his spine and into his heart, and despite the warmth of the afternoon he shivered.

Then, as one the three men turned and stared up at the platform where he was standing. Panic turning his legs to jelly, Dumont crouched back, fervently hoping they hadn't seen him. He knew he must think, plan a way out, but fear seemed to have paralyzed his brain as it had done his legs and he couldn't think of anything except that Ramidou was here.

Keeping low behind the barrier, he risked another quick look. He could hardly believe what he saw—the three men had turned and were climbing back into the car. As he watched, the big Mercedes moved forward, paused at the exit from the car park, and turned left toward the village. A second later it passed almost under the platform. If he had a bomb, Pierre thought, he could drop it on the car and his problems would be over.

A few feet away a middle-aged couple were watching him, their eyes wide, wondering if he was mad, crouching behind the barrier and acting as he was. He turned away.

Ramidou had left, but how far would he go? Pierre wasn't naive enough to think that, having found where he worked, Georges would drive away and leave him in peace. The fact that he had come to Les Eyzies, to this *grotte,* meant he knew he, Dumont, was here. No, he would stay somewhere nearby until he had recovered his money and his girl and dealt with the man who had taken them—and in Ramidou's vocabulary "dealing with" had only one meaning.

Dumont had to get away. Now. Somewhere where he could think and plan what he was going to do.

"Pierre!" Marcelle, the girl in the pay box, was calling to him. "The next party's ready!"

Hardly aware of what he was doing, he led the group into the first

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gallery, intoning from habit, "Mind your heads" and "Please do not touch the crystallizations."

Gradually the coolness of the cave and the water dripping from the roof soothed him. Granted Ramidou knew he was here, that still gave him another hour or two at the least. Even Georges would hardly try anything here. Pierre wished he knew whether Ramidou had discovered the cottage, but it was a relief to find his brain was clearer and he could think.

"On your left," he said, "you can see the greatest wonder of the caves, the formation known as St. Simon. . ."

His voice faded away and he stood stock still, staring at the column in the shadows a few feet away. Of course. It was perfect, so simple. Pierre was almost overcome by the splendor of his idea.

The members of the party were waiting for what he might say next. When he said nothing, looking as if he were in a trance, one or two of them became uneasy.

Dumont pulled himself together. "*Pardon,*" he said apologetically. "Just ahead. . ."

Now that he had his great idea he could hardly contain his impatience and he hurried the group along the passages back toward the entrance, hardly pausing to study the remaining sights. One or two people muttered complainingly and ostentatiously passed him without a tip or a word of thanks, but he hardly noticed them. There was much to do.

"I'm not well," he muttered to Marcelle. "I'm going home. Henri can take the next party."

"He won't like that," Marcelle said. She was attracted by Pierre and would have had something going with him if François, her fiancé, hadn't been so jealous. She studied him more closely. "You *don't* look very well."

"I think perhaps I have flu coming on." Dumont was mildly elated she thought he looked ill—she would remember it in the morning when he didn't turn up for work.

His heart pounding, he half walked, half ran down the slope, hurrying across the road and over to where his Renault 16 was standing under a tree. It was his third car since he left Marseilles, all of them second-hand popular models nobody would notice or remember afterward. Even Georges hadn't seemed to look twice at the Renault.

And he had had no time to plant in it one of the neat plastic explosive devices like the ones with which he had disposed of Louis

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and Juan the Spaniard. The thought of what might have happened when he started the engine made Pierre feel sick. He was sweating as he climbed in, turned the key, and the engine purred into life.

He didn't drive straight home. He knew too much to fall into that trap. Instead he drove in the opposite direction until he came to the next village, parked his car out of sight down a side turning, and found a public telephone. There he rang the hotel in Les Eyzies where Danielle worked.

The owner's wife answered and he cursed silently. Madame, who was nearly sixty, stout and hard-eyed, regarded all pretty young women with suspicion—Danielle more than most. There must be some reason for a girl with her attributes wanting to work in a quiet country hotel and Madame had decided it was almost certainly discreditable.

"She is employed to work, Monsieur," she informed Pierre acidly. "I will not have boy friends ringing her up when she is busy."

"But it is important, Madame," Dumont pleaded in his most beguiling tone, silently heaping coals of fire on her head. His hands were clammy and he wiped them down the sides of his trousers. "I am ill."

Madame, who was not as hard-hearted as she was suspicious and was still susceptible to the charms of good-looking young men, capitulated. "I will fetch her," she said. Then, her natural thriftiness asserting itself, "But do not keep her talking long, she has work to do."

"Only a minute, Madame," Pierre promised.

He waited, fidgeting with impatience as the seconds ticked past. At any moment Ramidou or one of his men might come this way and see him. If that happened he'd be caught like a rat in a trap, and, like the rat's, his end would be inevitable. What was Danielle doing? Couldn't Madame find her?

Then she was there, her husky voice full of concern. "What's the matter, Pierre? Madame says you are ill. Is it that meat you ate last night? I told you—"

Dumont interrupted her. "The meat was fine. There's nothing wrong with me, but I can't go back to the cottage." He stopped. "Georges came to the *grotte.*"

"What? Are you sure? It can't have been him!"

"I tell you it was. He was in the black Mercedes with Jacques and André."

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"Oh, darling!" Danielle paused, and when she spoke again her voice wasn't quite steady. "Pierre, I'm frightened."

"It's all right," Dumont told her. "I've worked out what we're going to do. Listen."

It took him more than a minute to explain and make sure she understood. Fortunately, she was intelligent and she had courage. Not that she would need it after tonight, Pierre thought. There would be no more hiding, bolting off to somewhere new every few weeks. Tomorrow they would be free—with two million francs and the world before them.

"You've got that?" he asked.

"Yes," Danielle said.

"Repeat it then."

She did so. "But what do you want the plaster of paris for, angel?"

"I'll explain that later," Dumont promised. "You'll be there at ten?"

"But yes, darling, of course. Take care of yourself. For me."

"I will," Dumont assured her. The love in her voice had bolstered his confidence and he was singing under his breath as he walked out into the street. His plan was perfect. By the time anyone knew what they had done they would be somewhere safe. Somewhere like South America. Pierre had always fancied a trip to Rio.

Getting back into the Renault, he laughed.

Marcelle wasn't surprised when Dumont didn't turn up for work the next day.

"I suppose I'll have to take his parties round too," Henri grumbled.

"Think of the extra tips," Marcelle told him. She had known Henri too long to take his complaining seriously. "But if you like, I'll ring Danielle and see how long he's likely to be away."

Mumbling something she didn't catch, Henri went off to collect the first group of the day for their conducted tour. As Marcelle dialed the hotel number, the last of the tourists were disappearing into the tunnel.

"Madame? This is Marcelle Normand at the Grotte de St. Simon. Could I speak to Danielle, please? Pierre went home early yesterday not feeling well and if he's going to be off for more than a day or two we shall have to get somebody to help Henri."

"Danielle!" Madame exclaimed bitterly. "She hasn't come in today. And she hasn't called. I suppose she's hanging around looking after him."

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"Oh, I'm sorry. Thank you, Madame."

Marcelle replaced the phone. She knew there was no telephone at the cottage Pierre and Danielle rented, so it was no good her trying to ring them. They would just have to wait and see if Pierre turned up tomorrow. In the meantime, Henri would have to manage and console himself with the extra tips he earned.

By this time his party had reached the farthest gallery.

"On your left you can see the greatest wonder of the caves," Henri informed them. "This crystallization is called St. Simon and you will observe that it bears a truly remarkable resemblance to pictures of the saint." The members of the group stared into the semi-darkness at the end of the passage.

Then an American woman exclaimed in shocked tones, "There are two of them! When I was here yesterday there was only one! The guide said it took two million years for it to form!"

Marveling whispers silenced. The other members of the group gaped. It was true, there were two columns. In unison, their heads turned to look at Henri. But he was staring at the two columns, apparently as startled and nonplused as they were.

At that moment the men in the gallery being excavated began work for the day. There was a muffled roar and Henri felt the rock under his feet tremble very slightly. The right-hand column of the two began to move, toppling slowly forward. They watched it, shocked into silence. It seemed several seconds before it hit the rock floor. It shattered into a thousand fragments, all of them under the grimy exterior white as chalk.

And there was something inside the column. Something lying stiff and straight on the ground, covered in dust. They stared at it in disbelief, then a woman screamed. For there was no doubting it, they were gazing at the body of a man.

"I did well, didn't I?" Danielle inquired complacently.

"Oh you did, chérie. You did more than well."

"And you'll buy me those diamond-and-sapphire earrings?"

"If they are what you want. You've earned them."

Yes, she had, Danielle told herself. On the other hand, once Pierre told her his plan, it had been simple. She had obeyed his orders to the letter, bringing the plaster of paris and other things to the *grotte* at ten o'clock. He was waiting for her there and by the time they had carried everything up to the first gallery, there had been only

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a quarter of an hour to wait before Georges was due. Pierre had been so high he might have been on drugs. He had wanted to make love to her but Danielle had refused, allowing him only two rather perfunctory kisses. She felt good about that now—it showed she had sensibilities. "It was perfect." Ramidou laughed with quiet triumph.

Danielle laughed too, and snuggled closer to him in the back of the Mercedes.

It had been Pierre's idea for her to find out where Georges and the others were staying and to telephone him asking him to come alone to the Grotte de St. Simon at ten-thirty. It had still been reasonably light and from the platform he could watch the car park and satisfy himself Georges hadn't brought anyone with him.

Yes, it was all Pierre's idea—only she had turned it upside down. Instead of Pierre shooting Georges and concealing his body in a plaster of paris cast at the end of the gallery, Georges had known about the trap and shot *him*. André and Jacques were waiting just down the road, and at a prearranged signal they hurried up to the passage, helped coat Pierre's body with the plaster, and stood it in position beside the real column. As Pierre had said, who would notice one column more or less among so many?

A week ago Danielle had called Georges to tell him she and Dumont were at Les Eyzies. She was bored with being on the run and with Pierre too—he was proving sadly distrustful over the two million francs. They had been there nearly a month and it was only the day before yesterday she had learned where he had hidden it. Now two hundred thousand of the francs were concealed safely next to her skin inside her new girdle. Danielle had never worn a girdle before and she didn't like it, it was hot and made her itch, but that was a small price to pay. Moreover, Georges had accepted it immediately when she told him Pierre had spent that part of the two million on their expenses rushing from place to place and on gambling and other women. She patted her stomach fondly. Her mother had always told her she was a practical girl.

She didn't see the gun Ramidou took from his pocket and held close to her head just behind her right ear. Nor did she hear the shot.

He watched Jacques and André dump her body in a ditch beside the lonely country road, feeling nothing. How could she have thought he would be prepared to take her back, to trust her again after her betrayal? He shrugged. There were so many pretty girls, what was one more or less?

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a *NEW* Inkwell Restaurant story by

RON GOULART

This older cartoonist had an idea for a comic strip about a big lovable St. Bernard who was always trying to help but always fouling up. Ken Hunnicut thought the idea was darn good and suggested they name the dog Boswell, after the man who wrote all about Samuel Johnson. It had always struck him as a neat name for a dog.

By the time Hunnicut had been drawing Boswell *for a year they'd taken in over four million dollars . . .*

A MILLION LAUGHS

by RON GOULART

He probably heard some of the nasty things we'd been saying about him. We hadn't been expecting him to drop in on our weekly Monday lunch at the Inkwell and we didn't notice him immediately when he came in out of the windy autumn afternoon and stood scanning the main dining room at the riverside restaurant.

But Heinz had started the thing off a few minutes earlier.

"Not one but *two* paperbacks on the halfwit *New York Times* list," he said, coming close to snarling. "Here's a guy who draws like Grandma Moses on a binge and that damn comic strip of his already has twice as many papers as my *Seaweed Sam.*"

"Since when is two times one hundred ten over seven hundred?" inquired Hollis as he lit another of his vile black cigars.

Heinz began frisking himself. "Listen, I've got my latest syndicate statement right here and it shows me in over four hundred and—"

"You keep counting all those shopping-news publications in Central America that get your strip free along with—"

"Gents," cut in Ty Banner, setting his glass of mineral water

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carefully down on the checkered tablecloth. "You're overlooking the most important element in all this. Here is this young cartoonist lad—what's his name?"

"Kenny Hunnicut," muttered Heinz.

"Here's Kenny Hunnicut," resumed Banner, "who has obviously caught the public fancy with this new comic strip of his—what's the name of the thing?"

Heinz's nose wrinkled. *"Boswell."*

"Right. *Boswell.* About a cat, isn't it?"

"Dog," said Heinz.

"A dog." Banner rubbed his hand across his handsome, though slightly gaunt, face. "Now the lad is all of—how old is he?"

"Twenty-seven," answered Heinz in a disgusted tone.

"Ah, yes. So here's a youth, a mere stripling, who comes along a year and a half or so ago with a new comic strip entitled *Boswell.* The blooming thing soon becomes a fabulous, fantastic success. Picks up hundreds of papers, gets reprinted in paperbacks almost immediately, becomes the basis for an animated TV cartoon special *and* a movie. This lad also gets his picture and that of his dog on the cover of *Us, People, Mammon, TV Life, Seventeen,* the *National Intruder, Time,* and even the Newspaper Artists Guild newsletter. Instead of bitching, we, practicing cartoonists all, ought to be asking ourselves what it is this tyke has going for him."

"Luck," said Heinz.

"Eh?"

"Luck," Heinz repeated, resting both elbows on the table and producing twin thumps. "The halfwit is simply damn lucky. That's what accounts for it. He can't draw, his gags are wretched—"

"Wait now," put in Zarley. "I haven't said much so far, but I think Hunnicut's stuff has a certain primitive charm. In fact, I sort of like the way he draws that St. Bernard."

"St. Bernard?" said Hollis. "Is that what it's supposed to be? All this time I thought it was a fat cocker spaniel."

"And," added Zarley, "I like the way he draws eyes."

"All his halfwit characters look like they're about to doze off," observed Heinz. "I suppose you adore the way the guy draws elbows, too. Hunnicut puts little curlycues on all the elbows. Where'd anybody ever see an elbow with—"

"Right there." Hollis tapped Heinz's elbow with his cigar-free hand.

Heinz ignored him. "Hunnicut has incredible luck," he said once

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more. "That's all. And did you see *The Times* this morning? His agent just died. Another piece of luck."

Banner frowned. "How's that lucky?"

"I think Mr. Heinz means because Ham Japanian and I had a fifty-fifty split deal." A plump open-faced young man had materialized beside our table. He was blond, bright-eyed, and beaming. His suit was expensive and the wrong shade of blue.

"Who might you be?" asked Banner.

"It's Hunnicut," I said, popping up out of my chair and holding out my hand. "Hi, Kenny. We met at the last NAG dinner."

"Sure, sir, I remember." He shook my hand vigorously. "This is a real treat for me, I can tell you."

"Sit down and join us," invited Zarley.

Kenny glanced around the table, hesitated a few seconds, and then took the vacant chair between Banner and Heinz. "Gee, I sure hope you guys don't mind my barging in like this. I've heard a heck of a lot about these Inkwell lunches of yours and I vowed that if ever I got out here to Westport on a Monday, I'd see if maybe you wouldn't mind if I sort of joined you."

"Not at all," assured Banner, sipping at his mineral water.

"What brings you to our fair city, Kenny?" Heinz asked.

"Oh, didn't you know? They had an autograph party for me over at the Incredible Book Shoppe this morning," Kenny explained, chuckling. "That's a swell store and all the people who work there are swell, too. When I got a gander at all the nice fans and admirers of *Boswell* lined up in the street, gee, I thought I'd be signing all day."

Heinz asked, "Why aren't you?"

Kenny chuckled. "Oh, they ran out of all their copies of my books. It'll take a while for them to truck in more." He glanced at his watch. "I guess, actually, I've only got time for a cup of coffee with you guys, if that's okay."

Banner said, "Why the rush?"

"Well, see, I met this swell girl from the Norwalk television station in the store and she wants to tape an hour with me this afternoon for their *Great Men, Great Minds* series. I can do that and then get back to the book store."

Heinz took his elbows from the table. "We thought you'd be in mourning, Kenny."

"Oh, because of Ham?" He shook his head, chuckling sadly. "Actually, guys, I have mixed feelings about poor Ham, God bless him."

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"I haven't seen *The Times* yet," said Zarley. "How'd Ham Japanian die?"

"He blew up," said Heinz.

Zarley sat up straighter. "Blew up? That sounds like it might be—"

"Actually," said Kenny, "Ham didn't blow up. It was the other two gentlemen who blew up."

Rubbing his hands together, Zarley asked, "Other two?"

"The two gangsters," explained Kenny. "They shot poor Ham dead and then blew up. It all happened quite near here, up in Danbury yesterday."

"What was your agent doing in Danbury with two gangsters?" asked Zarley.

Kenny lowered his bright blue eyes for a moment. "Well, gee, it's a rather sordid story," he said. "I'm sort of afraid it doesn't reflect well on poor Ham."

"Good." Zarley grinned in anticipation. "Tell us."

"I don't know if I ought to." The plump young man glanced around the table at us.

Banner told him, "There is some precedent, Kenny, for regaling one's tablemates with foul yarns of murder, mayhem, lust, chicanery, and similar misdemeanors."

"I suppose I could give you a brief account," decided Kenny, "while I'm having my coffee."

"Do," urged Zarley. "Do."

"Well, gee," began Kenny, "I guess I maybe ought to tell you about my hobby first. That's kind of what got the whole ball rolling. See, I've always been a great fan of the late great comedian Socko Sepulsky. Since you guys are all quite a bit older than me, I'm sure you remember Socko from his heyday. He was a truly funny man. Short and chubby. I've been told, in fact, that I'm built sort of like him. And, heck, maybe that's what got me interested originally in collecting Socko Sepulsky memorabilia. I'm way too young, of course, to have seen his 1940 movies when they originally came out. But, boy, did I watch them on the late show when I was a kid. *Half Buck Private, Gobs and Slobs, Postwar Pappy, Getting Gretchen's Girdle, Pratfalls of 1950, The Bowery Bums Meet—*"

"What," interrupted Heinz, "does all this nostalgia have to do with your agent blowing up?"

"Getting shot," corrected Zarley.

"Well, see," said Kenny, "it establishes some of the background

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for what Ham did and explains, sort of, why he was in the storeroom of that junk shop over in Danbury when he died." He paused to taste his coffee. "Gee, this is good coffee. I can see why you guys flock to the Inkwell here each and every week."

"Your story," reminded Zarley.

"I don't want to bore anybody."

"Not at all," Banner assured him. "Proceed, my boy."

Maybe I'd better [resumed Kenny] skip to where I left Omaha two years ago with the $15,000 and came to Manhattan. See, I'd been residing in Omaha, which is where I'd been since getting out of college with an A average, and working for the Gladd-Tidings Greeting Card Company.

The funny thing about the Gladd-Tidings Greeting Card Company was that it was actually run by a Mr. Gladd and a Mr. Tidings. When I once asked them how they got together, Mr. Gladd replied, "Kismet." That means fate. Mr. Tidings didn't much care for me as a person, mostly because he had this mistaken notion that Daisy, his beautiful and much younger than he third wife, was fond of me. I think he got the idea because Daisy often mentioned, in front of him, that she thought I was "as cute as a bug's fanny." I myself never did anything that would have led her to think I was more than just a loyal employee and a good friend of all of them. At any rate, Mr. Tidings had to control his unreasonable dislike of me because the greeting cards I was designing for them were so darn successful.

Well, before long Daisy got this crackbrain idea that she and I ought to run off together. I feel kind of bad that she actually took $15,000 from their joint account and gave it to me to hold for her. Before I could even tell her I thought she ought to put the money back, why, she'd gone and poisoned her husband. Well, he was almost sixty and had lived a full life, but even so. When they arrested her, she never mentioned my name. That was darn nice of her. I thought, though, that I'd best leave Omaha for a spell. I packed up, took the $15,000 with me, and came Eastward.

I guess you guys know what it's like trying to crack the freelance cartoon markets in the Big Apple. I mean, I made the rounds for three months without much success at all. Then I happened to run into, while waiting to see the cartoon editor of a cheap girlie magazine, an older cartoonist who had an idea for a comic strip. Well, I guess you couldn't spit off the top of the Empire State Building

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without hitting a middle-aged cartoonist with an idea for a strip. But this fellow's idea, about a big lovable St. Bernard who is always trying to help but always fouling up, was darn good. While he had the concept and some fair gags, he didn't have a name for the strip. I suggested we name the dog Boswell, you know, after the man who wrote all about Samuel Johnson. That always struck me as a neat name for a dog.

Talk about fate. The week before we were set to take the sample strips in and show them to Ham Japanian, who was, rest his soul, just about the best cartoon and comic-strip agent and rep in the business, my partner fell out of the window of his fifth-floor Greenwich Village apartment. Since he didn't have any relatives, I took over the strip, whited out his name, and kept the appointment with Ham.

Ham struck a lot of people as being snide, gross, and nasty. He did have that side to his character, and the fact he usually weighed around three hundred pounds didn't help him make a good impression on some people. Some fat men, like Socko Sepulsky for instance, are jolly-looking. Not Ham. He was one of your sinister fat men. Be that as it may, he was, somehow, one of the best darn salesmen in the world. He sort of delighted in selling things to people who quite obviously loathed him. He even charmed me, after he agreed to go out and sell *Boswell* to a syndicate, into signing a very tough partnership agreement. As long as we both lived, we'd split all profits fifty-fifty. Whoever survived would automatically gain control of everything. Well, you know how it is when you're young and anxious. You sign things you ought not to sign.

I guess I won't bore you with the story of my incredible success. Ham waddled over to Exceptional Features and they snapped up *Boswell*. The darn strip took off, to use a favorite expression of Socko Sepulsky's, like Gangbusters. By the end of the first six months *Boswell* had brought us, counting royalties on all the subrights and merchandising loot, over $750,000. Imagine that. More money than most of us expect to make in a lifetime. Boy, after all those months of struggling, it was all very gratifying.

I kept my apartment in Manhattan, but splurged and bought a small mansion in Greenwich, right overlooking the Sound. I also picked up a Jaguar car. You seem to do things like that when you're young and suddenly rich.

Well, by the time I'd been drawing *Boswell* for a year, things were

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even crazier. We'd taken in $4,300,000 by then, I keep saying we, you notice, because Ham was all this time getting half.

I had some mixed feelings, I guess. He'd helped sell my strip, sure, and he'd taken a hand in setting up some of the subsidiary business. I owed him a lot, but I was starting to wonder if I owed him half of my income for the rest of our lives.

Now I'm going to have to tell you a bit more about Socko Sepulsky, so you'll understand the next part of this.

After Socko's movie career waned, he switched to television. You must remember his *Dr. Hartwell's Toothpaste Funny Hour* in the 1950s and *Make Room for Socko* and *Love That Socko!* in the sixties. He was even funnier on TV, and his monologues, most of which I have on video cassette, were hilarious. Socko always told interviewers he owed his success to his gag files. He claimed he had over a million jokes on file, in five big grey-metal filing cabinets. *Life* ran a picture of them in 1964 with the caption *A Million Laughs*. To a collector of Socko material, those gag files were like the Holy Grail. I've wanted them for years.

I hate to admit my idol had feet of clay, but since it ties in with what happened to poor Ham, I guess I better. In the final decade of his life, Socko, who passed away in 1974, worked almost exclusively in Reno and Las Vegas. I'm afraid he sort of fell in with bad company. I suppose that's not uncommon when you're associating with gamblers and other types of criminals. Well, anyhow, Socko got to be very close with a fellow named Giancomo "Blowtorch" Macri. He was an alleged Mafia kingpin—the media called him the Little Godfather. He was five foot one. Soon after Socko's death there was a rumor that he'd kept a diary for years filled with details of the activities of Blowtorch Macri and a lot of his henchmen.

The problem was, and nobody knows this better than I do, Socko had managed to have seven wives and his effects got pretty scattered. By the time the hoodlums got wind of the diaries, they'd vanished from sight. There was a similar problem with the gag files, too, which also dropped from view at the same time. I know, because I've been hunting them for years.

Okay, so that brings us up to last month. I'm doing very well, Ham is doing very well. We're splitting millions of dollars and we ought to be happy as clams. Ham, though, wasn't.

He started brooding, brooding as only a fat man who isn't especially jolly can brood. It seems to have occurred to Ham that if I

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were out of the way, all of the $8,700,000 that *Boswell's* due to earn us in the next year would be his.

Oh, I can tell what you're thinking. If I was dead and gone, who'd draw the strip? My style's unique and it'd be darn hard to duplicate. But Ham, even with all his experience as an artist's agent, didn't see that. His idea was to hire somebody to imitate my style and pay that person, say around five hundred a week. That'd cost him a little more than $25,000 a year. If you deduct half from eight million, you know it. $25,000 he wouldn't even miss. As soon as he arrived at that conclusion, my agent started plotting my death.

Unbeknownst to me, Ham had spotted a girl who was working in the art department at the syndicate. A very pretty young woman, matter of fact, though she has a sort of silly name—Betti Jane Jane. Attractive, red-haired, slim, not more than twenty-two. Fairly bright, even though she allowed herself to fall under Ham's spell. He told her I was on the brink of a possible nervous breakdown and he'd feel better with a few extra weeks of *Boswell* in reserve. Because of the delicate nature of the situation, she wasn't to let on to anyone what she was up to.

Working nights in her little apartment in the East Sixties in Manhattan, Betti Jane turned out a couple of fair weeks of strips. Sure, they didn't sparkle the way mine do, but they weren't that bad. Ham was elated and went ahead with his plan.

A few weeks ago, when he and Betti Jane drove up to this part of Connecticut on an antiquing weekend, Ham discovered Maxie's Treasure House on the outskirts of Danbury. It was a sprawling place, down an alley and behind two long-deserted brick warehouses. A ramshackle wooden building with a big wooden storeroom behind, it sat in the middle of a weedy field with a high wooden fence backing it up. There was an ancient clawfooted bathtub with a bust of General Grant sitting in it on display in the front yard. The sagging porch held a rusty plow, a rustier unicycle, part of a sewing machine, a framed oil-painting of someone's cockeyed grandfather, and several buckets of paint. Inside, there was an even richer mix of antiques, junk, old books, magazines, rusty hardware, and dust. Maxie himself was a small grizzled man of fifty-five or so who wore old coat-sweaters from his stock and faded jeans. He opened up his shop only once in every three or four days.

Behind Maxie's main business room was this storehouse with a dirt floor and an accumulation of old office furniture, along with rope-tied bundles of *Life* magazine from the World War II years.

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When Ham noticed three battered grey filing cabinets huddled close together next to a fallen-over urinal, the final part of his plan popped into his brain. He learned from talking with the junk dealer that the proprietor of the Treasure House kept very erratic hours. He often left the place for two or three days at a time to go off hunting new treasures. He was especially fond of acquiring ancient plumbing fixtures and had been known to travel across three states in quest of a load of moldering hardware.

"What do your customers do while you're away?" Ham asked him.

Maxie moved closer to him. "The deadbeats can go take a leap," he confided. "But my trusted clientele, they can find a key to this storeroom under that old baby buggy outside. Them I let come in and browse. They see something they fancy, they drop a check in that barrel yonder."

"Ah," said Ham.

Well, a few days later he phoned me. I was sitting out on the terrace of my Connecticut place, watching some of my neighbors' yachts out on the Sound. My butler came out to inform me a man with a vulgar voice wanted to talk to me.

Pretending to be Maxie, Ham said, "I seen them write-ups about you in all the magazines, Mr. Hunnicut."

"Yes?"

"It mentioned as how you was a fan of this Socko Sepulsky guy."

"I collect Socko Sepulsky memorabilia, yes," I said. "Do you have some?"

"My name is Maxie Janvier," Ham told me. "I got this shop, Maxie's Treasure House, here in Danbury. You know where it is?" He gave me the address.

"I can find it. But what exactly are you offering?"

"Three filing cabinets," he croaked. "Full of jokes."

"Three? There are supposed to be five."

"Three's all I got. I picked them up at a—well, never mind. The three of 'em are jammed with jokes, all typed up on sheets of paper and file cards. There are some letters and photos, too, signed by Socko Sepulsky himself. Since I'm a real fan of your comic strip, Mr. Hunnicut, and since you're so interested in this comedian, I wanted to give you first crack."

"Sounds interesting," I told him. "When can I see the material?"

"I got to go out of town for a few days."

"When will you be—"

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"But you could come look anyways. I got a deal for special customers."

He explained if I hit his shop at about five the following afternoon, which was yesterday, Sunday, I could let myself in and look over the material. The prices would be marked on the cabinets.

I kind of hate to tell you this next part. But I guess there's no way of getting around it. What Ham did, see, was to call Maxie early yesterday morning and pretend to be a man in Stacpoole, Massachusetts, who owned a barn full of old faucets and showerheads. He wanted to sell the stuff at once. Maxie went scooting out of his shop within the hour. And about noon Ham snuck into the storeroom. He made sure nobody else was around, locked himself in, and went to work.

He'd noticed, on his first visit, that the whole place was a fire trap. Raw electric wires were dangling all over, a sooty kerosene stove was used to heat Maxie's office, and a rickety hotplate sat on an old sofa chair. A fire and an explosion at the Treasure House would look perfectly natural to the law.

To make sure there'd be an explosion and fire, Ham brought some things along. He'd had a client once who'd done a true-crime strip and he knew how to build a fair booby trap. He placed the things in the top drawer of the cabinet nearest to the door. I'd be sure, so he figured, to open that first to get a look at the jokes I'd been searching for all these years. Once the filing cabinet blew up, a fire was sure to start and wipe out all traces of the booby trap.

I'd be dead and Ham would own all of *Boswell*. He'd hire Betti Jane Jane to draw it and everything would be just fine. Not a bad plan actually.

At shortly after one in the afternoon, just after Ham had the booby trap installed and the drawer shut up again, the back door was kicked open by two large, surly fellows.

"We want the diary," said the one who had his .45 showing.

"Huh?" asked Ham, startled and puzzled.

"Socko's diary, dummy," amplified his companion, whose gun was obviously in the pocket of his overcoat. "The one that tells enough dirt about several dozen underworld kingpins to put them in the slammer for life. That diary."

"Well, I'll tell you, gentlemen," said Ham in his best sales voice, "I have no notion as to—"

"Those are Socko's filing cabinets, ain't they?" the first gunman asked, gesturing with his gun. "That's sure as hell what we heard."

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"Oh, that. As a matter of fact, there's been a mistake. These are—"

"Open that drawer," ordered the other one. "The one you got your hand on."

"No, that wouldn't be a good idea at—"

"Listen, jerko, we been looking for these damn cabinets for six frapping years. We know the diary's got to be in there. Open the drawer."

Ham backed away from the cabinet. "No," he said, "I can't." He must have realized this wasn't a situation he could easily explain. He spun and tried to run.

He covered about fifteen feet when they shot him dead.

He made another five feet or so before falling over, dead, into a legless bathtub.

"What a jerko," said the one with his gun in his pocket. "Now, c'mon, let's see what's in the drawer he was so antsy about."

The bomb worked just fine.

Picking up his cup, Kenny finished off his coffee. "Boy, this coffee is really great."

Zarley was frowning. "Hold on," he said. "How'd those mafioso guys know Ham was there at all?"

"Oh, didn't I mention that? I told them."

"How'd you know how to get in touch with them?"

"I guess I'm not much of a story teller," said Kenny apologetically. "I left out some of the details. See, after all the stories about me started appearing in the media, these two hoodlums paid me a visit. Turned out they were both fans of my strip, too. One of them even asked me for an autographed original. Well, I gave it to him and I let them rummage through my Socko collection. All in all, for gangland killers, they were nice and polite." He pushed back in his chair. "Naturally, they didn't find the diaries, since I didn't have them. They requested, though, that if I ever did run down the diaries or anything that might look like them that I give them a call. I thought that would be a good idea."

Hollis said, "But you had a hunch the whole deal at the junk shop was a setup, didn't you?"

"Gee, I sort of did," grinned Kenny. "But I don't know, I might have gone out there anyway. Thing was, I figured I'd better tell those hoodlums first."

Banner said, "There are still a few loose ends, my boy. How can you be sure those files really didn't belong to Socko Sepulsky? And

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how can you be sure there really was a bomb? Could be there actually was an accident. That means you'll never get your hands on those million laughs."

Chuckling, Kenny stood up. "Oh, I'll get them sooner or later. I have a feeling I will. As for knowing some of the other details, well, I have to admit that Betti Jane confided in me some. I don't know, women just seem to do that." He took a few steps back from the table. "It sure has been fun getting together with all of you. I hope I can do it again sometime. Bye."

He grinned around at us all, gave a lazy salute, and went strolling out of the restaurant in that boyish way of his.

Heinz watched him go. "Didn't I tell you the halfwit was lucky?" he said.

DETECTIVERSE

NARROW CHANCE

by RICHARD E. MAPLES

A beefy young burglar named Lime
Through a vent in the roof tried to climb,
But on the inside
It wasn't as wide,
So now he is stuck with the crime.

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"I've told you before," Cindy's mother said, "we can't relax. Not if you want to keep winning . . ."

MISS CINDERELLA

by JUDITH TORAL

Dorothy Folger took one look at the crowd of pre-teens and their mothers, all waiting to enter the Miss Cinderella Beauty Pageant, and yanked Cindy toward the ladies room. "Wait until that mob settles down to make your entrance. That way, you'll stand out from the others."

Cindy stiffened at her mother's touch, but Dorothy didn't notice. She slammed the rest-room door shut behind them. Dorothy was tall, with blonde hair stacked high. A wine-colored birthmark the shape of the state of Nevada covered one cheek. Studying Cindy, she frowned. "Your dress is wrinkled already."

Cindy had put the dress on a half hour before, when they stopped at the gas station to freshen up. Until then it had hung, along with her other Pageant clothes, in the back of the station wagon while Cindy slept and Dorothy drove. Driving all night before a Pageant saved buying a plane ticket. And since Cindy's father had fixed the back of the station wagon into a bed, Cindy could get her rest there as well as at any expensive motel.

Cindy tried to edge away. "My dress is fine. Relax." Dorothy reached in her purse for the makeup kit. She held Cindy still while she rubbed another layer of gloss onto her daughter's cheeks. "I've told you before—we can't relax. Not if you want to keep winning."

A ten-year-old in chartreuse organdy and white knee socks burst into the ladies room, bent over one of the toilets and heaved. Her mother, pale-faced, ran in after her. Cindy smiled sweetly at the mother. Winners smiled and losers cried. She'd learned that when she was six years old and Dorothy had enrolled her in her first Beauty Pageant. Now, six years later, winner of seventy-eight Pageants and First Runner-Up in thirteen others, Cindy smiled at everyone. Even Dorothy.

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Cindy thought it only fair that she hated Dorothy. Before they'd started going to Pageants, her mother had hated her. Cindy had once heard her telling a friend that Cindy's birth had ruined her life.

But then, a friend had suggested Dorothy enter her daughter in a Children's Beauty Contest. Cindy hadn't known how to walk or dress and she'd never had her hair professionally cut or styled, but she made it to First Runner-Up. Dorothy's watery blue eyes had become alert. She'd watched the winner and when the next contest was held, two hundred miles away, they were ready. Cindy's father had had to give up his weekly bowling, but Cindy's hair had been styled to make the most of her heart-shaped face and she had a new and different outfit for each Pageant event.

Cindy had won that contest, and their names had gone on a mailing list. There seemed to be Pageants and Contests every weekend if you knew where to go. Since then, Dorothy had dragged Cindy to every one they could get to. "You'll make Miss America someday," she'd say. "Or be another Cheryl Tiegs."

"She's already Miss America to me," Stan, Cindy's father, would observe mildly. "And you're Mrs. America." But Dorothy never seemed to hear him.

Cindy's fists tightened with fury at the thought of her father. Tomorrow was her twelfth birthday, and Stan had wanted them to stay home from the Pageant so they could celebrate as a family. "We never get to do regular family things. You two are always off at one of those Pageants," he'd complained mildly. But Dorothy had insisted they couldn't miss this particular Pageant, so he was home and they were here, and Cindy's only birthday fun would be a hamburger at a cheap restaurant.

Cindy glanced quickly in the mirror. But the fury didn't show on her face. Beauty Queens couldn't afford to show anger. They must smile a lot and be agreeable. She turned to her mother. "Come on, let's get it over with."

"Just a minute," Dorothy said, adjusting her hair. She wore it in a towering beehive of curls and coils, all anchored with a blue-china butterfly at the end of a long hair ornament. She thought the butterfly drew attention away from the birthmark. The hair ornament was an evil-looking contraption when you saw it out of her hair. It reminded Cindy of a letter opener with a butterfly perched on the end. But Dorothy loved it.

The crowd had gone into the conference room where the registra-

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tion and Welcoming Reception was being held. Cindy stopped in the doorway to the room. She smiled sweetly as people turned to stare at her. Some she recognized from other Pageants. She smiled an especially sweet smile at those people. Especially at the girls she'd beaten.

The Judges stood at one end of the room. You could always tell the Judges by the people around them. This time there were two men and a woman. The taller man had stylishly cut hair and wore a yellow sweater over an open-necked shirt. The other man was older and dried-up looking. The woman wore a flowered dress. There were bright pink spots on each of her cheeks. The tall man turned and moved aside. Cindy's expression froze as she saw that standing between the two men, smiling winningly up at them, was Mary Eileen Doyle.

Dorothy sucked in her breath and pinched Cindy's arm.

"I know, I know," Cindy whispered.

Cindy had first met Mary Eileen at the Living Doll Pageant last year. The two girls were the same age, were both just starting to bud into maturity. Cindy's hair was an ash blonde and her eyes a light blue. Mary Eileen's hair was deep auburn and her eyes a vivid green. Mary Eileen was technicolor, Cindy black and white. Until Mary Eileen had started entering Pageants, Cindy had won almost every one she entered. No longer. Mary Eileen could turn Cindy into a First Runner-Up—a loser.

"Cindy," Mary Eileen cried, running toward her from across the room, "I hoped you'd be here!"

Cindy's smile tightened. Mary Eileen liked her. She actually liked Cindy. The stupid idiot didn't understand how ferocious the competition was at these Pageants, how important it was to win if you were going to compete.

Mary Eileen's mother followed her daughter. "Cindy, how nice to see you! And, Mrs. Folger, how have you been?"

Dorothy tried to pull Cindy away. "Fine, just fine, Mrs. Doyle. Cindy, there's someone we have to talk to."

Cindy looked up at her mother. Dorothy had warned her not to let people see her and Mary Eileen close together. "Hang around with the ugly girls, if you have to hang around with anyone," she'd said.

Cindy slipped her arm through Mary Eileen's. "It can wait," she said, smiling. "I haven't seen Mary Eileen in ages. And she's one of my best friends."

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The Judges walked past as Cindy and Mary Eileen strolled off. "The sweet little things have so much fun at these Pageants," the woman chirped. "They form friendships that last a lifetime."

Cindy glanced back at her mother. Dorothy glared after them, her face a mask of hatred at Mary Eileen. Cindy smiled. If looks could kill, the dumb redhead would be dead.

The Pageant was an all-weekend affair—Saturday morning the Welcoming Reception, Saturday afternoon the Miss Photogenic Contest and the personal interviews, Saturday night the Talent Show. Then on Sunday morning the Swim Suit Pageant and at the Awards Luncheon on Sunday Miss Cinderella would be crowned. Fifty ten-to-thirteen year olds competing for trophies and awards to take home.

Cindy's father had built shelves all along one wall of their tiny living room to house Cindy's trophies. Dorothy treated Stan with scorn, despite the trophy case and the sacrifices he made so that Cindy could compete. Once Cindy had heard her say, "I'd never have married him if he hadn't knocked me up." She wasn't sure what knocked-up meant, but she did know her father loved her for herself, not for her trophies, and that she much preferred being home with him than here with Dorothy.

Still, the Miss Cinderella trophy would look beautiful on the shelves along with her other awards, and since she was here she intended to win it. And that meant beating Mary Eileen.

At first it looked as though she would easily accomplish that. Saturday afternoon she was chosen Miss Photogenic. And Saturday night, when she donned a silver-and-blue lamé twirler's costume and did a baton number to the theme song from *Rocky*, everyone clapped so hard it seemed the walls would collapse.

Mary Eileen, dressed in a green-plaid kilt, was waiting to go on when Cindy came off stage. She grabbed Cindy in a big bear hug. "You were terrific!"

Cindy stared at her. Mary Eileen just didn't seem to understand the unwritten rules of Beauty Pageants. Finally she muttered, "Good luck."

Mary Eileen ran out onto the stage as the orchestra began playing "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling." Mary Eileen's high clear soprano filled the air.

Dorothy shook Cindy. "You idiot. How could you wish her luck? Don't you know she could beat you?"

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Cindy looked up at Dorothy. Her mother's face was flushed an angry red, so that all of her skin was almost as dark as the hated birthmark. She looked ugly.

Dorothy gave her a last shake and, blue butterfly quivering in her hair, stomped off. One of the waiting mothers stared after her. "That one's dangerous," she said.

"It's the truth," another mother said. "I know darn well she's the one who stole my daughter's ballet slippers so Susie couldn't compete in the Miss Talent division of the Teeny Miss Pageant. She'll stop at nothing if it means her daughter will win."

Cindy's eyes narrowed. She looked thoughtfully at the two women.

Then Mary Eileen's soprano came to a halt and was followed by waves of applause. The names of the finalists were announced and Cindy joined Mary Eileen and three other girls on the stage.

And, as the Judges announced Third Runner-Up, then Second Runner-Up, she felt it coming. Mary Eileen was going to win Miss Talent. And if she did the two girls would be tied going into the final event, the Swim Suit Competition.

"First Runner-Up," the M.C. announced, "Cindy Folger!"

Mary Eileen had won Miss Talent.

When the girls left the stage, Mary Eileen's mother ran up to her daughter and gave her a warm hug. Mary Eileen hugged her back. "Mom, I've got a chance to become Miss Cinderella!"

"You're already my Cinderella," her mother said.

It was what Stan would have said. Stan was pleased when Cindy won, but it would have been all right with him if she never won another Contest. Stan didn't have a competitive bone in his body.

Cindy stared at Mary Eileen, at her glowing red hair, her perfect white complexion, her wide green eyes. Most of all, she stared at her warm, loving mother. It wasn't fair. Mary Eileen already had everything. What did she need to be Miss Cinderella for? A wave of determination swept over her. *She* was the one who should win. And she would win.

At the Swim Suit Contest the next morning, the girls paraded across the stage to the tune of "Isn't She Lovely?" Dorothy stood on the sidelines, a proud smirk on her marred face as Cindy walked out, one hand on her hip in the classic pose.

"It's going to be either Cindy or Mary Eileen," one of the mothers sighed.

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Dorothy looked pityingly at the woman. "Cindy will be Miss Cinderella," she assured her.

It turned out she was right. Forty-nine girls marched down the runway, hands on almost-developed hips. But the only one who could take the award away from Cindy—Mary Eileen—didn't show up.

The prune of a Judge sucked in his breath at the sight of all the budding beauties, felt the stirrings of an old urge he'd smothered years ago. Young girls were so lovely. So unspoiled. So— He sighed.

While he and the other Judges debated, Mary Eileen's mother announced hysterically that her daughter was missing. "I can't find her anywhere! She wouldn't have missed the Swim Suit Competition!" she told the other mothers.

"Maybe she's just nervous. Try the bathroom," someone suggested.

Cindy was declared Miss Swim Suit and the hall erupted into cheers.

Dorothy smiled smugly as they returned backstage to change for the Crowning Ceremony. But her smile faded when they learned Mary Eileen's body had been discovered in the bathroom, the long pointed end of the butterfly ornament buried in her heart.

"I wondered where it was," she whispered feebly. "I couldn't find it this morning." She turned to Cindy. "Remember I was looking for it when we were getting dressed?"

Cindy shook her head. "No, Mother, I don't." Mostly, she remembered how hard it had been to push the ornament into Mary Eileen's chest—how afraid she'd been that it wouldn't kill her. "I think we'd better call Daddy," she said.

The rest of the Pageant was canceled. As the police booked Dorothy, Cindy felt a lightness rise up inside her. It was over. No more Pageants. No more of Dorothy's pushing and shoving. Now it would be just Cindy and Stan, living like normal people.

Stan didn't let Cindy go to the trial. He drove the five hundred miles alone and listened while psychiatrists testified that extreme ambition had driven his wife over the edge. After Dorothy was admitted to the State Mental Hospital, he returned and gently told Cindy her mother was very sick and that she was where doctors could help her.

He looked off into space.

"I blame myself. I should have seen the pressure was getting to be too much for her."

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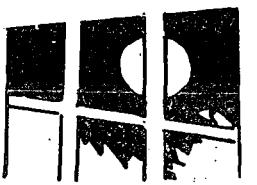
Cindy patted his hand consolingly and smiled sweetly. "Poor Mama."

Stan looked at her, a worried frown creasing his face. Then he brightened. "Listen, Cindy, I'll make it up to you. You're not going to have to give up your Beauty Pageants. Find out when the next one is and I'll take time off to take you. We'll go to all the Pageants, just like you and Mama did. And my beautiful little girl will be a winner every time."

Cindy smiled. She realized that she was going to be smiling for the rest of her life. Because, after all, winners smiled. And Cindy Folger was a winner.



DETECTIVERSE

AN UNFAST BREAKFAST

by K. E. STEVENS

I know a seal that's hard to break—
It rivals old Fort Knox.
I only wish they wouldn't make
It on my cereal box.

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Lee-Anne and Gary Coburg were a close and loving couple and equally successful in their separate careers. Lee-Anne had her own radio talk show on which her husband secretly considered her to be magic, and Gary's boss, Sloane McFiddick, publisher of The Daily Nation, *considered him the best sportswriter in Montreal. But Gary's best friend Arthur Hennesy had taken a dive from the window of his seventeenth-floor office at the newspaper and Gary couldn't accept his death as suicide.*

"Gary, cut this out," Lee-Anne told him. "Forget about Arthur Hennesy before something terrible happens to us."

"I can promise you one thing," Gary said. "They may start playing baseball with plaster bats, but I'm never *going to forget about Arthur Hennesy . . ."*

DEAD MAN'S QUESTION

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Night after night, my dead friend Arthur has been visiting me in my sleep. He sits across a tavern table wearing a top hat and a strange mauve cape fastened by one button under the chin. Other people are with us but I can't tell who they are.

"Where do we go from here?" I address the table. Nobody speaks and Arthur sits there looking directly at me, his face devoid of expression beneath the brim of that funereal hat. His eyes hold mine; he knows his old friend Gary will catch on sooner or later.

At breakfast this morning I mentioned my recurring dream to my wife. I was keeping it to myself in order not to upset her. Lee-Anne said: "You liked Arthur. Seeing him in a dream isn't that unusual."

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She was putting on the big straw hat with its wisp of trailing pink nylon. She drives downtown and walks along Ste. Catherine Street on her way to the radio station and traffic comes to a halt. It's the long jet-black hair, the white linen suit, the confident way she moves.

"Who do you interview today?" I asked her.

She flashed the book she had been reading last night and this morning over coffee. It was yet another diet plan. "The author's in town. Don't come to the door, finish your breakfast." She leaned over me and a veil of fragrant hair brushed my cheek. Her kiss was a lot more nourishing than what I was eating. "Are you covering a game today?"

I'm a sportswriter with a Montreal morning paper. "No, the Expos are idle," I said. Then I added, feeling stubborn, "I'm going to sit around and wonder what it is about Arthur Hennesy."

Lee-Anne paused in the kitchen doorway. She turned and showed me a face I'd rather not see again. It was something other than sad. It was as if I'd opened a door and caught her doing something shameful.

"Sorry," I said. "I shouldn't go on about him."

"Arthur killed himself," Lee-Anne said. "He was working too hard and drinking too much and he owed money to a lot of people. And his wife had left him. It's sad as hell, and for three months I've been trying to get out of my mind the picture of him going through that window."

"I should shut up."

"No, don't shut up, talk about him if it helps. But not to me, please, Gary. Not at nine-thirty in the morning."

The front door closing should have brought the curtain down on that particular scene. But it didn't. I remained sitting at a tavern table with Arthur Hennesy, dressed for the opera, waiting for me to do something.

I cleared away my breakfast dishes, deciding what to do. Detective work isn't my line, but I persuaded myself to make a move and see what happened.

The idea came later that morning. I would retrace Arthur's movements on the day he died, beginning at the end and working back. That would mean getting into his office, which might pose a problem.

On the way downtown, relaxing on a 66 bus, I thought about it. When I climbed down at the Atwater Terminus, I had a procedure worked out. I walked down Closse Street past the Forum, turned

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onto Lincoln Avenue, and entered the new highrise that houses that bulwark of Canadian Anglo-Saxon pride, *The Daily Nation*. Our publisher, Sloane McFiddick, is famous for doing unexpected things like establishing an English-language tabloid in Montreal at a time when the tide of French-Canadian nationalism is rising and more than one English paper has folded.

Our office manager is a benign old sweetheart, a former bank manager, retired early, working out his last few years purchasing stationery and interviewing typists. "Osgood," I said to him, "you have to help me. It's you or nobody."

He squared himself at his desk, welcoming my problem. "What is it, Gary?"

"I have to get into Arthur Hennesy's office. There may be something in there."

He frowned. "The police locked the office when they finished with it. Mr. McFiddick has told me to keep it locked."

"I know. But there are some photographs—" I told him about a mythical party at which Arthur and I posed with a number of cocktail waitresses from one of the neighborhood bars. "They aren't dirty pictures, it was all innocent fun. But if they get loose, I wouldn't want to have to explain it to my wife."

Osgood is a team man—it was all the persuasion he needed. I took the key and rode an elevator to the seventeenth floor. Arthur's office door was at the end of a short corridor. I let myself in and closed the door—and the silence hit me. The room had been sealed for weeks, creating a sarcophagus smell that kept my breathing shallow.

There was no way I would go near the window to open it. The last person to do that was Arthur himself, just before he took his dive into eternity and my dreams. I sat at his desk and looked around. On my right was the battered Royal standard on which he typed his orders for advertising space. The suicide note, so the police said, was composed on this machine. My question was: "Before or after he went through the window?"

Arthur's desk was neat because Arthur was neat. The varnished surface was ringed with glass and bottle marks because Arthur was not opposed to taking a drink late in the day. He'd been filling a lot of empty time since his wife had taken the kid and gone home to Calgary.

Tucked under a corner of the desk blotter were several sheets of lined paper covered with Arthur's scrawl. I turned the pages and saw lists of company names and telephone numbers. Some of them

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were scratched out, others were circled or had tick-marks placed against them. This was my old friend's work in progress, sales prospects he was following up in the hope of selling them an ad in *The Daily Nation*.

The top page had only a few names on it. The last entry was brief: the name Fournier followed by the words "Quarter page"and two telephone numbers, the first number crossed out and the second one written beneath it. This might be the business Arthur had been attending to on that Sunday afternoon three months ago.

I picked up the telephone and dialed the first number. A heavy male voice came on and said: "Carousel Club." I put the phone down without speaking. The Fournier name, a common one in Montreal, was now identified beyond doubt. The manager of the Carousel on lower Drummond Street is one Bruno Fournier, businessman, bon-vivant, famous for breaking girls' hearts and men's arms. I dialed the second number, getting it done before fear dumped sugar in my gas tank.

"Allo?" A female voice, French-Canadian, husky and vaguely familiar.

"Is Bruno there?"

"No, he is not. I don't expect him. Who is it?"

"It's okay. I just wanted to ask him something."

"Is that Gary? Gary Coburg?"

"Yes, it is. Who's this?"

"Mariette Dubé. I thought I knew your voice. That was good what you wrote about my big match at the Forum."

"You put on a good show." Mariette Dubé is the top female wrestler in Quebec, possibly in North America. She combines strength, gymnastic ability, courage, and ferocity with a feminine appeal that sets her apart from the draft horses in the game. Not knowing what I was doing, I decided to press on. "Can I come over and see you? I want to have a talk."

"Sure. I'm in all day."

I put down the phone after agreeing to come by her apartment at three o'clock. I sat back and closed my eyes. Soon it would be time for lunch. I could walk over to Peel Street and have the ham and beans at the Rymark. Arthur and I used to go there when we were both learning our jobs with a neighborhood paper in Notre Dame de Grace. We earned the square root of nothing but we enjoyed our cheap pleasures. A couple of cold drafts in the tavern, a bag of cherries from Dionne's, and a bench in Dominion Square.

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Arthur would tell me about his childhood, growing up in Verdun on the bad side of the river. There were gift baskets in school for the poor kids at Christmas. Everybody knew who the poor families were. One year there was a miscount, an extra basket was delivered. The teacher scanned the room, then presented it to Arthur. He wept all the way home with that basket of tins and jars. It was the first time he'd realized they were poor.

Somebody rapped, then opened the door and came into the office. I turned from the window through which I'd been staring into the sunlight. Even before my vision cleared, I recognized that tall bulky figure, the regimental bearing, the bald dome on top.

"Mr. McFiddick, sir," I said smartly because I know he likes that form of address.

"Morning, Gary," he said. "We haven't seen each other in a while."

"Busy men, sir." I had to ask the question even though I felt I knew the answer. "How did you know I was here?"

"Osgood rang me as soon as you left him with the key."

Yes, Osgood is a team man all right—and McFiddick is captain of the team. "I hope you don't mind, sir," I said, getting in first, "I know you wanted the place kept locked but there are some photographs I had to find." No sense inventing another story. Osgood had undoubtedly reported the one I told him.

McFiddick pretended to believe my lie. "I understand, my boy. No problem." He walked to the window and stood looking down. Arthur's fall obviously occupied no part of his imagination. My boss is so wealthy the only death that frightens him is his own. "Gary Coburg," he announced, "is the best sportswriter in Montreal."

"Thank you, sir."

"Could become the best in Canada. One of the best in North America."

"You're talking about a lot of sportswriters."

"I knew you were good even before you won the Press Award last year. I used to read your stuff in the NDG paper. That's why I hired you when I started *The Nation.*"

"It was the break I needed, sir."

He turned and faced me, a giant silhouette masking most of the window. "Don't become distracted, my boy."

"Sir?"

"This newspaper faces a desperate challenge. We'll need all our strength, all our skill, our genius, to defeat the efforts of our French-speaking rivals to bring us down. They won't be happy till we're

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gone and they control everything. The only way we win is to hold firm to the principle of English-language sovereignty in every part of Canada. Including Montreal."

I had heard versions of the speech before. Sometimes it was bloodthirsty, sometimes seductive. I waited for him to continue.

"I need good journalism, every day, in every section of the paper," he went on. "I'm counting on you, Gary, to show the way in the sports pages."

"I intend to do my best, sir."

"I know you do." McFiddick came forward and towered over me. "Don't become distracted. This—this tragic affair—it's over."

"I can't help thinking about Arthur, sir. He was my friend."

"Then you owe it to him—we all owe it to him—to make our lives as productive as possible to balance the life he wasted." The boss watched me carefully, the way a biochemist might observe a virus. "Do you take my point?"

"I do, sir." I gave him something he could take away with him. "I certainly won't come back in here, sir."

Mariette Dubé let me in, put an arm around my shoulder, and walked me into her sitting room. The comradely treatment made me feel almost as if we were brother and sister. But not quite. Her skin gleamed and she smelled of the lotion that promoted the glow. She had tennis champion's hair, sunbleached, very clean, falling naturally around her country-girl face. The figure was the kind they use in glossy magazines to sell expensive products.

"Have a drink, Gary," she said, releasing me in front of an expanse of glass with the city and the river twenty floors below. I forced myself not to cling against the opposite wall. "Anything you want." She was jingling bottles inside a teak cupboard. "I have everything."

"I know," I said and she rewarded my ponderous flirtation with a playground smile. "I'd like a beer."

"I hope this is business, Gary. Are you going to write a feature about me?"

"Someday I'd like to. Nobody has ever done justice to female wrestlers. You're as special in your way as Muhammad Ali or Larry Holmes. Or Luciano Pavarotti for that matter. You're the best. Because of the talent you were born with and the way you've worked to develop it."

"I love the way you talk. Does your wife know where you are this afternoon?"

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"What makes you think I'm married?"

Color rose in her cheeks. "I guessed. The good ones always are."

"A feature might be a fine idea. We could use a picture of you on the cover of the weekend supplement." I swallowed some beer. "I'll talk to McFiddick and see if he agrees."

Mariette laughed. She took a sip of her drink and had difficulty with it as she laughed again. "Somehow I don't think it's ever going to happen."

"Why not?"

"Never mind. Tell me why you wanted to see me."

I explained about Arthur and she listened with a serious expression on her face. Yes, she had read in the papers about the man who jumped from a window. "I didn't know he was your friend."

"It doesn't matter. I don't think it has anything to do with you. Except he telephoned this number on that Sunday afternoon. I have reason to believe he was trying to get in touch with Bruno Fournier."

"That's right." Mariette had a mosquito bite on her leg above the knee. She scratched it, then smoothed the glossy skin for miles around. "I got it swimming, they never leave me alone. Have another beer." She took my glass and I wondered what it would be like to sit for hours and watch Mariette Dubé do things.

"Bruno's a friend of mine. He was here that afternoon, and your friend—Arthur?—he traced him here. He rang up and spoke to Bruno about taking an ad in the paper. He must have been some salesman. Bruno couldn't say no. He told him to come over and bring the contract."

I nodded. "Arthur was a workaholic. Very persuasive. He could pick up the telephone and convince the PLO to recognize the state of Israel. That's what he was doing that Sunday afternoon, selling space in the paper, catching people he couldn't contact during the week. Catching them off guard." I accepted my second beer.

"So he came in here and made the pitch to Bruno. It was fabulous to listen to him work. We gave him a drink."

"And?"

"That was it. Bruno signed the contract and your friend went away."

"End of story."

"Not quite, I guess." Mariette put a sympathetic hand on my shoulder. "He went back to that little office and took a dive."

A mental alarm-bell went off. I decided to respond. "Little office? Arthur Hennesy had a desk in the corner of the typing pool." I

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watched her face for a reaction to my deliberate lie. Nothing happened.

"Whatever you say." She shook me gently. "I really am sorry, Gary."

In a taxi on my way to the Carousel Club, I considered the nasty feeling I was carrying away from my interview with Mademoiselle Dubé. The words "little office" could be innocent enough. You have a little salesman, he works in a little office pushing his little pen over his little contracts. Don't be so suspicious, Coburg.

But there was something else. It was as if I'd attended a rehearsal a couple of weeks before the play was ready. Mariette's sincerity had come across as no more than eighty percent.

So. One more feeling to add to my collection of dreams and bad vibrations. Gentlemen of the jury, you must convict on the basis of an overwhelming weight of extrasensory perception. Convict who, sir? I'm afraid I don't know.

The Carousel is a seventy-year-old brick building doing its best to appear glamorous by putting on a sheath of flashing lights and a glass picture panel on either side of the front entrance. I walked past publicity photographs of rock bands onto spongy maroon carpet and into an atmosphere of stale beer, musky perfume, and dead cigarettes.

On my left, a narrow doorway opened into the Rendezvous Bar where the on-duty hookers were drinking, alert as kudus at a waterhole. I moved on to the main room. It was quiet in here at four-thirty in the afternoon—unlike later that evening when some savage band from Detroit or Philadelphia would be generating sounds no recording session has ever been able to capture.

I asked a waiter where Bruno Fournier was hiding—not in those words, in case he might tell Bruno. Using my famous sportswriter name and smile (the one in my photograph at the top of my daily column), I influenced the young man to lead me through a padded door and up six steps to another door with a handle like the ones you see on cold-storage rooms. He pressed a buzzer. A canned voice said: "Yeah?"

"Gary Coburg wants to see Mr. Fournier. The sportswriter."

Unless Fournier was now reporting for La Presse, the waiter was not expressing himself accurately. But we all knew what he meant.

"Okay, send him in." The voice sounded enthusiastic, as if my arrival was the best thing since the invention of quick-drying ce-

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ment. The waiter worked the handle and the cold-room door swung open. I went through, expecting to find racks of Fournier's victims frozen in polythene bags. But there was only Bruno himself, on his feet to greet me.

"Sit down, Gary. Who do you like in the series against Atlanta?"

"We're batting well," I said. "We'll take their pitching apart."

"I'll get a bet down." He stood with both hands pressed flat on top of a mahogany bar as if he was going to play it. "What'll you have to drink?" Well dressed, three-quarter-sized man; blues and greys and blacks; blue shirt, grey hair, black shoes, grey tie, blue eyes, black circles.

I asked for a beer and he found it for me. "I start every day reading your column," he said. "We don't have anybody like you in the French papers. Santé." He watched me drink, leaving his freshly poured whisky on the bar.

"I just came from talking to Mariette Dubé," I began. His face showed he knew how to look baffled. "The lady wrestler," I said. "She's a friend of yours."

"Oh, yeah. Mariette."

"I talked to her about a friend of mine. Arthur Hennesy." I ran through the background of Arthur's death three months ago, ending with my discovery today that he'd been to Mariette's place that Sunday to see Fournier about taking space in *The Nation*.

"I remember now," Bruno said. "Strange guy. Very intense. A friend of yours, Gary? Boy, could he sell on the telephone. I don't know if Mariette told you. We were relaxing over there, just the two of us. You can imagine how good he was if I said yes to him."

"Arthur was good all right. Can you shed any light on what happened?"

"He made that special issue sound like the most important thing that ever happened. He was helping me by making sure the Carousel was in it with an ad. I believed him, the way you believe a priest. So I said come over and bring the contract."

This part still sounded true. "So he came over."

"And I signed the contract and he went away."

"Leaving you and Mariette Dubé to get on with whatever you were doing."

Bruno went to get his drink and I had a feeling the meeting had just ended. "Are you kidding? I wouldn't go near that woman without a referee. She'd break your back."

"Thanks for the drink." I decided to stir up the waters a little bit.

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"I don't think my friend jumped, by the way. I think he was pushed. And I intend to find out who did it."

Leaving the club, I passed the waiter who had taken me to Fournier's offfice. "Hey, Mr. Coburg, my brother loves baseball. Got any Expo tickets?"

I took two from my wallet. "Here's a pair for the Atlanta Braves. Have a good time." I left him looking embarrassed by his success.

The Mount Royal Hotel is two blocks away from the Carousel. I walked there and slipped into one of the telephone booths below the mezzanine stairs. I dialed *The Nation* and asked for Rolly Parker in Production. He came on the line thinking of other things. "Hey, Wolf," I said, "how are those arms? Are they getting hairy? I noticed a full moon last night." I'm the only person who takes the trouble to tease Rolly Parker. He loves it. He's a conscientious, near-sighted man in his forties and he happens to have hairy arms.

"What can I do you for, Gary?"

"I want to know if Arthur Hennesy put through an order for the Carousel Club, quarter page. It would have been on his last day. The Sunday."

"We haven't had anything for the Carousel in a long time."

"Would you look in the book and tell me?"

He went away and came back a minute later, leafing pages. "Nothing here from Arthur for the Carousel."

"Right. And has the club been complaining, asking where their ad is?"

"I'd know if they'd been doing that."

"Thanks a lot, Rolly," I said. "Think the rain'll hurt the rhubarb?"

"Not if we keep it in jars," he assured me. "And well back on the shelf."

The studios and offices of radio station CJSM are located in an old-fashioned office building on Ste. Catherine Street. They were designed in the 1920s to house the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which moved out ten years ago into a modern tower on Dorchester Boulevard. My boss, Sloane McFiddick, had always wanted his own radio station and saw this as a chance to acquire one. He took over the old CBC premises and modernized the equipment but retained the old art-deco interiors which are straight out of an Alexander Korda movie. How he got the government to grant him a

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license to broadcast is a secret between him and his member of Parliament.

I tracked my wife down to the staff canteen. She was drinking machine coffee with one of the on-the-spot news reporters, a seven-foot redhead named Ferguson.

"Hi, Gary," Lee-Anne said as I sat down. "Have a coffee."

"She must hate you" was Ferguson's comment as he crumpled a saturated cup and tossed it across the room into a trashcan. Two points.

"I had in mind taking you to Mas des Oliviers."

"He must love you," Ferguson said. He gathered up his portable tape-recording gear and stood up like a Kodiak bear. "Sorry I can't join you. I have to work."

When we were alone, Lee-Anne gave me the half-second inspection. "What's wrong?"

"I've been going around asking questions about Arthur."

"Gary, leave it alone."

"It's a very interesting story."

I watched her making up her mind to humor me. "I think we'd better have dinner," she said.

We were immersed in the civilizing influence of provençal cooking. Our table was near the soup tureens and we spoke against the reassuring clatter of copper lids. "Is that everything?" Lee-Anne asked. "It doesn't sound like much to me."

"Not as hard evidence," I agreed. "But the feeling is with me and it won't go away." I repeated the sequence of events. "Arthur went to Mariette Dubé's flat that afternoon. He went there to see Bruno Fournier. He was successful in selling the man a quarter-page ad. Then he went back to his office, typed a suicide note, and jumped out of the window. That's what they'd have us believe."

"It's possible. Manic-depressive people swing up and down. Wasn't he drinking a lot?"

"Arthur always took a drink, that was nothing new. And he was not manic-depressive. If anything he was a bit paranoid. He shared Sloane McFiddick's belief that the French-Canadians are out to get us. That's why he worked so hard for the paper. To Arthur, it was a cause. He was dedicated." I recalled late-night conversations we had shared. "He saw McFiddick as some kind of saint, a hero. St. George reborn to defend English rights. McFiddick could do no wrong."

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The waitress was asking if we wanted more coffee. I had to look away to hide the emotion in my eyes. Lee-Anne refused the coffee and asked for the check. Then she said to me: "You're becoming as obsessed as Arthur was. You need to relax."

On the street, leading the way to where she had parked the car, she said: "You're coming with me, young man, and I'm going to take your mind off this nonsense."

"Where are we going?"

"Where the lovers go. And they don't worry about dead friends. They're too busy living."

She drove the car expertly at speed up Côte-des-Neiges and swung right onto the Camilien Houde Expressway, which glides over the mountain and down the eastern slope onto Park Extension. At the summit she slowed down, wheeled into a space against the parapet, and switched off. On either side of us, parked cars contained shadowy figures.

We stared in silence at the panorama of the giant city at night—a sweep of dark sky, the darker mass of land dusted with tiny lights. There was movement on the boulevards and bridges and on this summer night the whole mass breathed like a banked coal fire.

Later she said: "Feeling better?"

"Much." It was a long time since I had fooled around in a car. The risk of getting caught made it exciting. "This marriage could yet be saved."

"Too bad we don't smoke. You're supposed to light two cigarettes."

"I can offer you a mint."

"I won't say no."

We unwrapped our candies. I switched on the radio and landed in the middle of a CJSM news bulletin. The announcer was saying: "No further details are available at the moment but to repeat the news flash—a shooting has taken place inside the Carousel Club in downtown Montreal and first reports say the well known local athlete Mariette Dubé has been killed. Police have asked the public to stay away."

Lee-Anne reached forward and switched off the radio. I said: "I want to go down there!"

"Why?"

"Something's going on!"

"The police said stay away."

"I saw Mariette this afternoon. Then I went to the Carousel and

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talked to Bruno Fournier. About Arthur. Now this happens. I can't accept the coincidence."

For the first time in years, Lee-Anne sounded as if she'd had enough of me. "Damn it, Gary, I'm sick of this business. Can't we just go ahead with our lives and forget about Arthur Hennesy?"

"Maybe you can. I can't. Not as long as I keep having that dream."

She drove down the hill and let me out of the car at the corner of Drummond Street. I walked to the club and went inside. There was no music but lots of people sitting around with their drinks wearing off. It was like a failed New Year's Eve party at half past twelve.

The first person I saw—and I was glad to see him—was Detective-Sergeant Lucien Lacombe. Lucy used to be the shortstop on a pretty good ball team in the commercial league. He was good enough to have received an invitation to spring training from one of the major-league organizations. But he respected his father's wishes more than he loved baseball and Papa wanted his son to enter the priesthood. This was too much of a good thing, so Lucien compromised and became a cop. With a bit of luck and a lot of steady work he had moved up in the organization.

"What happened?" I asked him.

When a big-league shortstop can't complete the double play, I sometimes remark in my column that Lucien Lacombe would have made it. Lucy gets a kick out of reading those columns. Now he drew me into the circle of his confidence. "Mariette Dubé? Know her? Sure, you wrote about her. She was in here tonight and some crazy guy shot her in the head."

"Assassination?"

Lucien combed his moustache with a fingernail. "It was not an argument among friends."

"What does the guy say who shot her? Have you got him?"

"We've got him."

"What does he say?"

"He's dead, too."

"How come?"

"Bruno Fournier shot him right after he killed Mariette."

I was not surprised. "The Oswald/Ruby syndrome," I said. "Tell me about it."

Lucy led me to a couple of stools at the end of the bar. A bartender approached but the detective waved him away. I could have used a drink. Somebody thought to put money in the music system and Don

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McLean began to sing about starry nights and an unhappy painter who never completed his life-span either.

"It happened at the foot of the stairs leading to Fournier's office," Lacombe said. "Mariette had been up to see him and she was on her way down. The guy with the gun must have been waiting. As soon as she came through the door, he put one between her eyes. From what Fournier says, he heard the shot, grabbed his office gun, and ran down the stairs. The guy turned on him and Fournier shot him three times."

"Self-defense," I said. "The way hunters fight off ducks."

Lucy adjusted his glasses and gave me a penetrating look. "Have you got something I haven't got, Gary?"

"Only suspicions." I told him about my conviction that Arthur Hennesy hadn't jumped from his office window three months ago. I went over his connection with Mariette Dubé and Bruno Fournier, tenuous though it was. I described my visits that very afternoon to both of the central characters in this evening's tragedy. I even mentioned Arthur's efficient work habits—if he had come back to his office alone, he would have put through the paperwork for the Carousel ad. But no such order had been completed.

"You seem to be conducting your own investigation," Lacombe scolded me. "Those things never help the police."

"My idea was vague. Now that something's happened, I'm telling you everything."

Lucien took a notebook from his pocket and turned pages. "The guy with the gun was a drifter from Vancouver. I put his name in and the computer says he's had drug convictions on the coast. No trouble here until tonight."

"It fits," I said.

"Go ahead."

"Fournier was worried about Mariette revealing something to me about what happened to Arthur Hennesy. I had a feeling this afternoon she was only telling part of it. He must have asked her to come and see him tonight, arranged for this lunatic to kill her, paid him cash or guaranteed a drug supply for him. Then once he'd done it, Fournier took him out."

"The guy had no money in his pockets."

"So it was drugs. Where did he get his gun, have you checked it out?"

Lucien got to his feet. "You're starting to sound like my com-

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manding officer," he said. "Keep out of the investigation from here on. If I turn up anything that applies to your friend, I'll be in touch."

As soon as Lacombe walked away, I gave the bartender the nod. I ordered a beer and a bourbon and drank both quickly. I sipped a second beer, waiting for inspiration. It arrived in the form of the youth who had my Expo-Atlanta tickets in his pocket. He drifted by and stood southeast of me, fingering the seams of his trousers.

"Bad mess, eh?" he said at last.

"Not good for some," I agreed.

"Killed business for tonight."

So even business was dead. The next thing to go would be hope, and, after that, love. "Did you see what happened?" I asked.

"Not the first shot. I heard that. I came running and I saw Bruno give it to that crazy bastard."

"Bruno must have been scared," I ventured.

"Not him. Bang, bang, bang. The poor guy never knew what hit him."

Crazy bastard, poor guy—the waiter's attitudes were flexible. "Did you see anything else?" I asked. "Did Bruno say anything to you?"

"No, he just shot the guy. Then he took the gun from his hand." The youth concentrated. "Yeah. Then he reached inside the guy's jacket and took out an envelope. Then he ran back upstairs."

"I see." My heartbeat accelerated. "Is Mr. Fournier on the premises at the moment?"

"Not only that," the waiter said, keeping a straight face, "he's also upstairs in his office."

Bruno was surprised to see me for the second time in less than twelve hours. His enthusiasm was beyond arm's length—he had to stretch to drag out a smile. "Hey, Gary, come on in. Have you heard what's been happening here?"

"Indeed I have." I sat down without being asked. "I heard the whole story from Lucien Lacombe." I decided to leave the young waiter out of it in the interests of his making it to the Atlanta game. But I was not above exaggerating to keep the kettle boiling. "Lacombe is not happy with the way the pieces don't fit."

"What do you mean?"

"The fact that Arthur Hennesy came to see you on his last afternoon. In Mariette's flat. And that I went to see her today and then came here and talked to you. And then she comes here to see you tonight. And then she gets shot. And then you shoot the guy who

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killed her." The beer and the bourbon were affecting my brain, bringing out my self-destructive tendencies. "It's all so—" I searched for an analogy "—so Agatha Christie."

Fournier's face darkened. He was at the bar taking out a bottle. Now he put it back and closed the door. "You're making a big mistake."

"I don't think so."

"You really are. And you don't even know it."

"I'm only trying to discover why my friend went out his office window."

"Okay. So you dig and you scratch and you bring up the truth. Can I tell you what it will be?"

"Tell me."

"Something that should have stayed buried. You won't like it."

"It's always the people with something to hide," I said comfortably, "who want to keep the truth buried."

"Everybody has something to hide," he warned me.

"So what?"

"So this, Mr. Big-League-Sportswriter." He sat down behind his desk and turned those dark eyes on me in a primitive, baleful stare. "Don't be in such a hurry to make waves. Not when you're sitting so close to the edge of the boat."

I was still puzzling over that one as I left the Carousel Club. Waiting in the street outside was Lee-Anne's reporter colleague Ferguson, festooned with recording equipment and holding a charred cigarette between his teeth.

He zeroed in on me. "Gary Coburg," he said. "What did you hear in there?" He touched a button on his belt pack and a microphone sought my face.

"It's an interesting situation," I said. "I'm not sure how everything fits together but I can tell you this. Mariette Dubé wasn't shot by accident."

"Go on."

"Her killer was paid. Then he was shot to keep him from being interviewed."

"Can you verify that?"

"Probably not, but it's what I think happened."

"Sounds a bit melodramatic."

"That's right. Which makes me think somebody is scrambling to cover something up . . ."

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When I got home it was half past two. As I slammed the taxi door, the light went off behind the bedroom window. Lee-Anne was not interested in conversation.

In the kitchen I found the debris of her loneliness—a mug half full of coffee, cookie crumbs on the counter, a couple of crumpled paper napkins, slippers in two places on the floor, a paperback folded open and two newspapers spread over the table. My compulsion is to have things neat, so I changed all these signs of life to the sterile order of a photograph in *House Moderately Beautiful.*

On my way to the stairs I glanced into my office. The light was on. My chair was turned sideways, the telephone was drawn forward on its side table. Most revealing, a booklet of personal numbers was lying open. Lee-Anne's anxiety remained in the room like a radio left on low.

For some reason, I wasn't surprised by what the telephone booklet told me. It was open to the 'Mc's. There was the familiar name and his home number—she must have been on the phone late in the evening talking to my boss, Sloane McFiddick. I could imagine the conversation.

I'm worried about Gary, he won't stop going on about Arthur Hennesy. I'm afraid to think where it will end. Can you speak to him? I know he respects you.

I lay down at last between cool sheets with the flat taste of bourbon on unbrushed teeth. For a minute or so, we shared the awareness that she was awake.

"Are you all right?" she said, full voice.

"A bit tired. I'm sorry I woke you."

"I wasn't asleep."

"Are *you* all right?"

"Not really. I'm worried about you."

"Don't be. This business is nearly sorted out." After a while I went on. "Mariette was killed because she knew something."

Lee-Anne turned the talk off. "I don't want to hear about that."

Some time later I fell asleep. The dream arrived on schedule but a new scene had been added. It began as before—the tavern table, Arthur facing me in top hat and cape. "Where do we go from here?" I asked, following the script.

Then my friend did his new thing. He got up from the table and moved onto a dance floor. A woman drifted into his arms and they began performing athletic spins and dips, locked close against each other. It was a while before I established the woman's identity and

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experienced only a mild surprise. Arthur was dancing with Mariette Dubé.

In the morning, Lee-Anne came downstairs in her dressing gown when I was just about to leave the house. Usually she gets dolled up and takes off before I do—it was unsettling to see her moving around like a convalescent.

"Did you dream again last night?" she asked, filling the kettle.

"Better than ever."

She had some advice for me. "Gary, cut this out. Forget about Arthur Hennesy before something terrible happens to us."

I sorted coins from my pocket and held the right change in my hand—boarding a bus must be a tidy procedure. "I can promise you one thing," I said, moving toward the door. "They may start playing baseball with plaster bats, but I'm *never* going to forget about Arthur Hennesy."

The summons for me to come up and see Sloane McFiddick in his top-floor office was unusual enough to be exhilarating. His office is a bit like the control tower at a small wartime air station. All four walls are mostly glass. The desk rests in the middle like a console. There is a door leading onto a gravel path surrounding the glass cube. You could do an 80-yard jog around the perimeter if you felt so inclined. McFiddick probably does. A four-foot brick parapet would keep most people on the roof and off the street.

McFiddick was out there when I came into the office. I could see his broad shoulders and the tanned dome of his head. I moved into the doorway. "Morning, sir."

Without turning, he said, "Come on out, Gary."

I went out and formed up on his right, a respectful two paces back from the edge of the parapet. "You can see the green hills of Vermont," I said.

My peerless leader was not admiring the scenery. "I heard about that broadcast of yours last night," he said.

It took me a moment to realize he was referring to my brief interview with Ferguson outside the Carousel. "Did they put it on the air?" I said. "It must have been after I was in bed."

"I didn't hear it, either. But your wife did."

Crafty rascal—he had taken away a weapon I might have wanted to use. He knew Lee-Anne's telephone call was probably clandestine. "Yes," I lied, "she told me as soon as I came in that she'd rung you up. I gave her hell for disturbing you at home."

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"I didn't mind." He turned to face me, smiling with the warmth I wish my father might have shown me. "She's a worried lady, Gary. And I share her apprehension. We're both afraid you may be going too far."

"She told me."

"Let *me* tell you." He sought the proper words. "Sports is supposed to be a diversion."

For me they were obscure words. "Sorry?"

"People see your picture in the pages of *The Nation,* they read your columns. It's always about heros, about victories, about valor on the field of play. That's why we have sports, to compensate for the dirt and boredom we face in day-to-day life."

"I go along with that."

"Imagine, then, what your public must feel when they turn on their radios and hear Gary Coburg talking about shootings and suspects. And undercover activities."

"They probably wonder."

"As I do." My boss rubbed his face, and when his hand came away the smile was gone. "You're beginning to muddy your image, my boy. Badly. If it keeps up, I'll have to take you off the sports beat. Put you on crime reporting."

He gave this disclosure half a minute to sink in. I tried to register concern as I watched a jumbo jet slide silently down the flight path into Mirabel.

"Would you do that, sir?" I said at last.

"I may have to." He put his arm around my shoulder and, God help me, I leaned against him. "If that happened, Gary," he said, "you'd be starting over."

I felt a rebellious urge not to be his man. I had to get out from under that protective arm, so I shrugged him off and moved a step away. "Well, sir," I said, "you've always told me I could become the best sportswriter in Canada. Maybe this threat of yours is what I need to get me off my butt."

"No threat," he cajoled.

"And as for my wife," I concluded, "don't worry about Lee-Anne. She's a resilient girl. And she wants to see me succeed."

"I'm sure she does." His eyes narrowed in a disturbing way. When a rich man thinks, it's bad news.

I pressed on. "Whatever's bothering me will bother her. She may complain about it now, but in the end Lee-Anne and I will solve it. We'll talk and we'll sort everything out . . ."

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Two days later I slept late. It had been a long night, full of sweats and fears. I woke up to find Lee-Anne had gone to work without disturbing me. I made some coffee, then switched on the radio. Her show was due on at eleven o'clock. I don't think I've ever told my wife how clever she is. She takes to the air five mornings a week for an hour of conversation with a different celebrity every day. She never sounds crass or conceited. Her intelligent goodness shines through. For all this she gets from me a silent respect that takes her performance for granted. Secretly, I think she's magic.

The news and weather came and went. Then, in place of the familiar theme of the Lee-Anne Dolan Show—it was established before she married me—the station began putting out an interlude. I waited for the reference to technical difficulties. Instead, an announcer said, "The Lee-Anne Dolan program scheduled for this time is not available. In its place we offer you—"

I got through on the telephone. "Hello, it's Gary Coburg. Is Lee-Anne there?"

"Hi, Gary." The switchboard girl knows me from parties. "No, she didn't come in. We're having to fill."

"I know. Did she phone in?"

"We haven't heard a thing."

Neither of us said what was on our minds—that Lee-Anne, in nine years of broadcasting, had never missed a program without making other arrangements at least a week ahead.

I drank a second cup of coffee, trying to dispel a bad sensation. I felt as if I had to start running as hard as I could. But I didn't know where, or why.

My wife maintains a couple of female friendships from the old days. I located their telephone numbers in the little blue book, the pages embroidered with Lee-Anne's meticulous handwriting. My questions were direct—I'm trying to find her, do you know where she is?

Neither of them had heard from her in weeks.

I wasted another ten minutes thinking about her disappearance, trying to make it scan. Eloped with a boy friend I knew nothing about? Lee-Anne would tell me about him after the first date. Injured in a road collision and taken to hospital? Her purse was laden with identification—the station and I would have been informed.

I took up the telephone and dialed once again. The officer who answered put me through to Detective-Sergeant Lacombe. "Lucy, it's me. Something's happened to Lee-Anne."

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"What?"

"She left for work this morning but never showed up. They're playing music."

"That's not like Lee-Anne."

"Not in any way. I'm coming down."

I blew a few dollars on a taxi ride into town. The driver enjoyed dropping me off at No. 10 Station on Maisonneuve. Lucien's telephone kept ringing and he had half a dozen files on his desk but he sent somebody for coffee and took the time to listen to me.

"The usual thing," he said, "is to let forty-eight hours go by before we bring in Missing Persons. All kinds of people show up again of their own accord."

All I had to do was look at him. Lucy could not pretend that Lee-Anne is all kinds of people or that this situation was the usual thing.

"Okay," he said. "Tell me who you suspect."

"I suspect Bruno Fournier. I don't know what he's up to but he killed that poor junkie from Vancouver right after Mariette was put to death. It was a set-up, my friend."

"Listen, Gary. The way you went on the air last night saying those things about the murder—it does me no good."

I was remembering something. My wife's recent prediction was coming back to me.

"What are you thinking about?" Lucien asked.

"Lee-Anne told me something the other night. She said forget about Arthur Hennesy before something terrible happens to us."

We drank bad coffee and thought dark thoughts. "She just wanted to get back to normal," he said.

"No, more than that. This whole thing ties together in some way we don't understand. Mariette and Fournier and Arthur Hennesy and Lee-Anne—it's all one thing."

"Mariette and Hennesy are dead. Lee-Anne has disappeared. You want me to arrest Fournier?" Lucien looked as if he would if I gave the word. "What for?"

"Obviously you can't," I said. "But can you talk to him?"

"If it'll make you feel better." He got up and I followed him from his office. "But I don't know what I'm going to say to him."

"We'll think of something on the way over," I said.

We were too early—Fournier was not around. Lucien was pressed for time but he agreed to wait fifteen minutes. "Here's something you can say to Fournier," I said as we sat in the upholstered chairs

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of the Rendezvous Bar. "Ask him what was in the envelope he took from Vancouver's pocket after he shot him."

My friendship with Lacombe came very close to ending. "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I'm telling you now."

"Who told you?"

"Reporters never reveal a source. You know that."

"Reporters can go to jail for witholding information."

"I'm not witholding." The pain in his eyes made me stumble on. "Hennesy didn't jump," I said, "he was pushed. I know it. I'm having the same dream almost every night. But nobody wants to know. You guys closed the file. Suicide. So I'm on my own trying to find what went on. I spoke to Mariette about it and a few hours later she was killed. I'm convinced Fournier was behind it. The envelope is easy—it was the money he paid the guy to do the killing. He'll never admit it, you haven't lost anything."

Lacombe's expression changed from anger to pity. "You poor guy," he said, "this dead friend of yours, he's got you crazy. And now your wife." He stretched out a boot and used it to disturb my chair. "Don't worry, we'll find her."

"Be mad at me, Lucy," I said. "I can't stand the sympathy."

My young waiter friend came into the bar. He said: "Are you the people waiting for Mr. Fournier? Oh, hello, Mr. Coburg."

"Hello."

"He's not coming back till tonight. He just phoned."

"Rain, no game," Lucien said.

The youth was watching my face. "My brother and I enjoyed the ballgame," he said. "Thanks for the tickets."

"Glad you had a good time." I got up to go, following Lacombe's example.

The waiter followed us to the door. As we went through, he said to me: "I'm sorry about your wife."

We were a few steps along the pavement before his remark sank in. I took Lucien's arm. "Come on back!" I said. The youth was still standing in the doorway, looking like a lost dog, full of loyalty and fear. "How do you know about my wife?"

"I listen to her programs. I've seen her when she was interviewed on television. I saw the two of you in here one night when the Buddy Rich band was touring."

"But why sorry about her? For what?"

He looked back inside the club. "I can't say any more."

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"Do you know what's happened to her?"

"I don't want to get killed."

"You'll come with me," Lacombe said, "and you won't come back till we know what you know."

"Tell me," I said softly. "Don't tell the police. Tell *me*."

The youth made up his mind. "Don't use the toilets down here," he said, "everybody uses them. The ones with the rooms upstairs are better. Top floor, end of the corridor."

Lacombe waited a few seconds before he asked, "Are there guards?"

"Fournier's there. It isn't true he's away till tonight. When he came back and heard you were waiting to see him, he went up." A bartender called and the young waiter vanished.

Lucien looked at me. "I'll ring in and get some people here. There's a right way to do this."

"You must be joking." I was on my way up the stairs. "He snatched Lee-Anne this morning. He saw us and now he's gone up there. And you want to go by the book?"

Lucien joined me and we took the steps two at a time. One flight. A second. A third. We found threadbare carpets and anonymous doors up there, a rooming house for the girls who work the Rendezvous Bar. The top floor was a little less seedy—fresh wallpaper, new black paint on the bannister and the door at the end of a short corridor.

Lee-Anne screamed as we reached the landing. A piece of furniture went over, glass crashed on the floor. Then a gun went off.

Lucy raced me to the door, his gun unholstered, his boot raised to shatter the lock. As the door sprang open, I saw my wife dancing with Bruno Fournier. They were cheek to cheek, staggering, each with one arm raised straight up in an absurd tango. His hand held the gun, hers gripped his wrist. Bruno squeezed the trigger again and another bullet smashed into the ceiling.

I yelled, "Lee-Anne!" as Lucien's gun came up. He was suddenly motionless, alone on the firing range, concentrating. He fired and Fournier spun against the wall and sank to the floor, staring at me, not seeing.

Lucien went to him. He shook his head, got to his feet, turned away. "I don't like it," he said. "I wanted him alive."

After Lee-Anne gave her statement at Number 10, she was still shaking. I was ready to take her home but she didn't want to go

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there. We went to a club I belong to on Stanley Street. It started as a second-hand bookstore and the management has kept the shelves and thousands of dusty volumes. It's a quiet place with a good kitchen and big drinks.

I was able to eat, but Lee-Anne only rearranged her plate as we discussed why she had kept quiet about Arthur's murder. "You started it," she said. "When you suggested I interview Mariette Dubé."

"It was one of your best programs."

"I know. And I liked her."

"No harm in that. I did, too."

"But it was different with me." Lee-Anne looked wistful, then defiant. "Her life, her friends, the excitement surrounding her all the time—it was as if another side of me responded to it, the side I find it hard to show."

"Except with her."

I wanted to take hold of my wife, to reassure her that none of us are simple. We want to try everything. The bookkeeper is a stripper, the sportswriter is a ballet dancer. The sophisticated broadcaster is a six-drink party girl. We don't mean any harm.

I sliced the rare center from my steak—the part she prefers—and transferred it to her plate. "Keep talking," I said gently.

"For a year I attended her parties, met all kinds of people. It was exciting. And Gary, I never—"

I got in fast. "That's the part I don't want to hear about," I said.

"All right." She looked at me as if she understood. "That Sunday was a small affair. I used basic excuse number twenty-two, about researching an interview, and drove over to Mariette's place. A few people were there, some of her crowd. Fournier came in—I'd never met him before. And McFiddick was there, with Mariette."

It took a couple of seconds for the name to register. "Sloane McFiddick?"

"Yes. He and Mariette saw a lot of each other."

"You didn't tell that to Lacombe."

"No. I didn't see the point. It was Mariette who went back to the office with Arthur after he made his sales pitch to Fournier. She's the one who forced him through the window—and she's dead. She can't be punished any more."

The revelation had shocked me when she told Lacombe—now I had to contemplate it again. Mariette Dubé struggling with poor Arthur, using her strength and physical expertise and probably the

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element of surprise as well to bundle him over that window ledge. Perhaps she knocked him out first—she had the power. Then she must have sat down and cold-bloodedly composed the suicide note on his typewriter.

"It's starting to make sense. McFiddick was the missing link." I pushed my plate away. "What you told Lacombe was thin. There was no motivation. Why should Mariette kill Arthur just because he crashed her party? And why did Bruno feel he had to get rid of Mariette?"

"I could tell Lacombe wasn't convinced."

"No, and he'll be back to talk to you again."

"There'll be no point in mentioning McFiddick."

"Why not? If he was with Mariette that afternoon, then he's the reason it all happened. Arthur came to sell an ad to Fournier. He found a party in progress—girls, booze, fun on a Sunday afternoon." I ignored the look in my wife's eyes and kept on. "Lo and behold, there is his prestigious boss, his hero, Sloane McFiddick, pillar of the community, deeply involved with the sexiest lady wrestler in North America. I can imagine how Arthur responded to that."

"He was about as prudish as you are," Lee-Anne said.

"McFiddick had to protect his name—he knew something would have to be done about Arthur Hennesy."

"I heard them arguing. Your friend sounded irrational. He'd been drinking. When McFiddick told him to forget what he'd seen, Hennesy said he didn't take orders from a whoremaster."

"That sounds like old Arthur." I was exhilarated. The chase was coming to an end and I felt full of running. "So McFiddick sent Mariette to get rid of the man who could damage his reputation back at the office. And when I began making waves, he put rich man's pressure on Fournier to have Mariette silenced. I can imagine the favors Fournier must have owed my boss."

"It's true."

"And after that clumsy episode only made things worse, Fournier took it upon himself to grab you, the other person liable to talk to me about the party."

"Bruno met me outside the station this morning. He said he had things to say, so I went to the club with him." She shook her head. "I didn't even know those rooms were up there."

"That surprises me," I said, hating myself for hurting her. "And now you say we mustn't mention Sloane McFiddick's involvement to the police. Would you mind telling me why?"

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"Because it won't do any good." She was regaining her composure. "He's too rich, too influential. And all he's done is make some suggestions to people."

"That's called accessory to murder. And you want him to go free?"

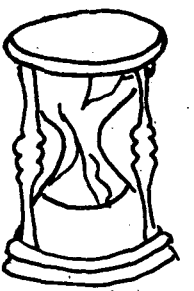
"I didn't say I want it. I'm only saying you can't pin anything on him. All you can do is cause a lot of upset which could ruin our careers in this city. Maybe in other cities where he has connections."

My righteous anger reached the boil. "This is preposterous. The man is only a man and he's guilty."

"Not preposterous," she said. "It's the facts of life."

It was clearly up to me to make sure justice was done. And what did I do about it? I went to Lucien Lacombe and told him, in so many words, how Sloane McFiddick caused the murders of Arthur Hennesy, Mariette Dubé, and the drifter from Vancouver as well as the lawful killing of Bruno Fournier. This testimony was delivered three weeks ago. I am sitting tight now, doing my job and holding my breath and waiting to hear what happens to the old man up in his glass control room. So far nothing has happened to him—or to me, either.

Except that Arthur still comes to the tavern table every night and sits there looking at me.



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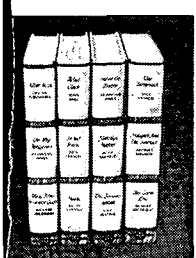

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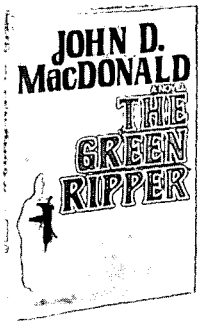

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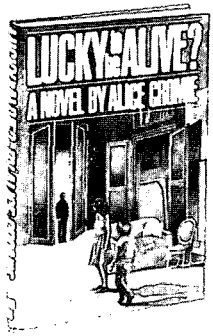

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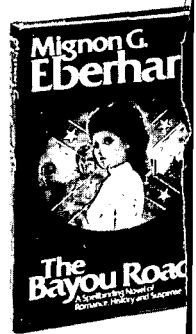

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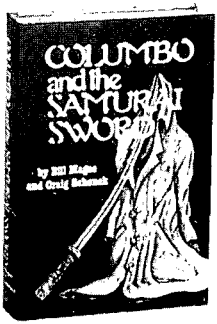

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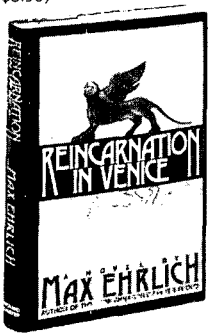

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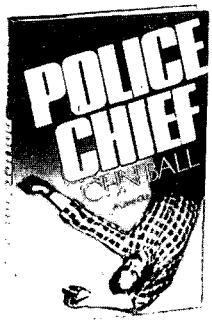

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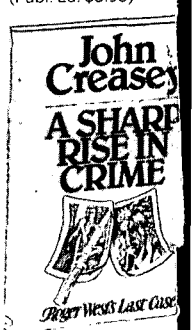

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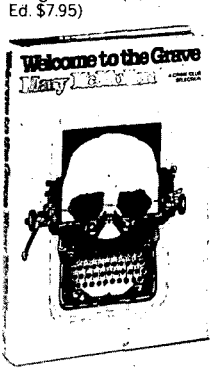

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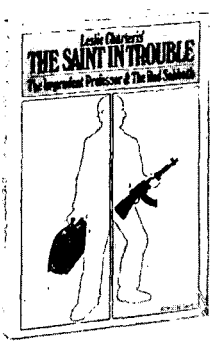

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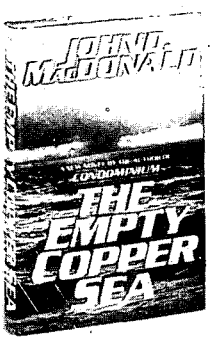

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